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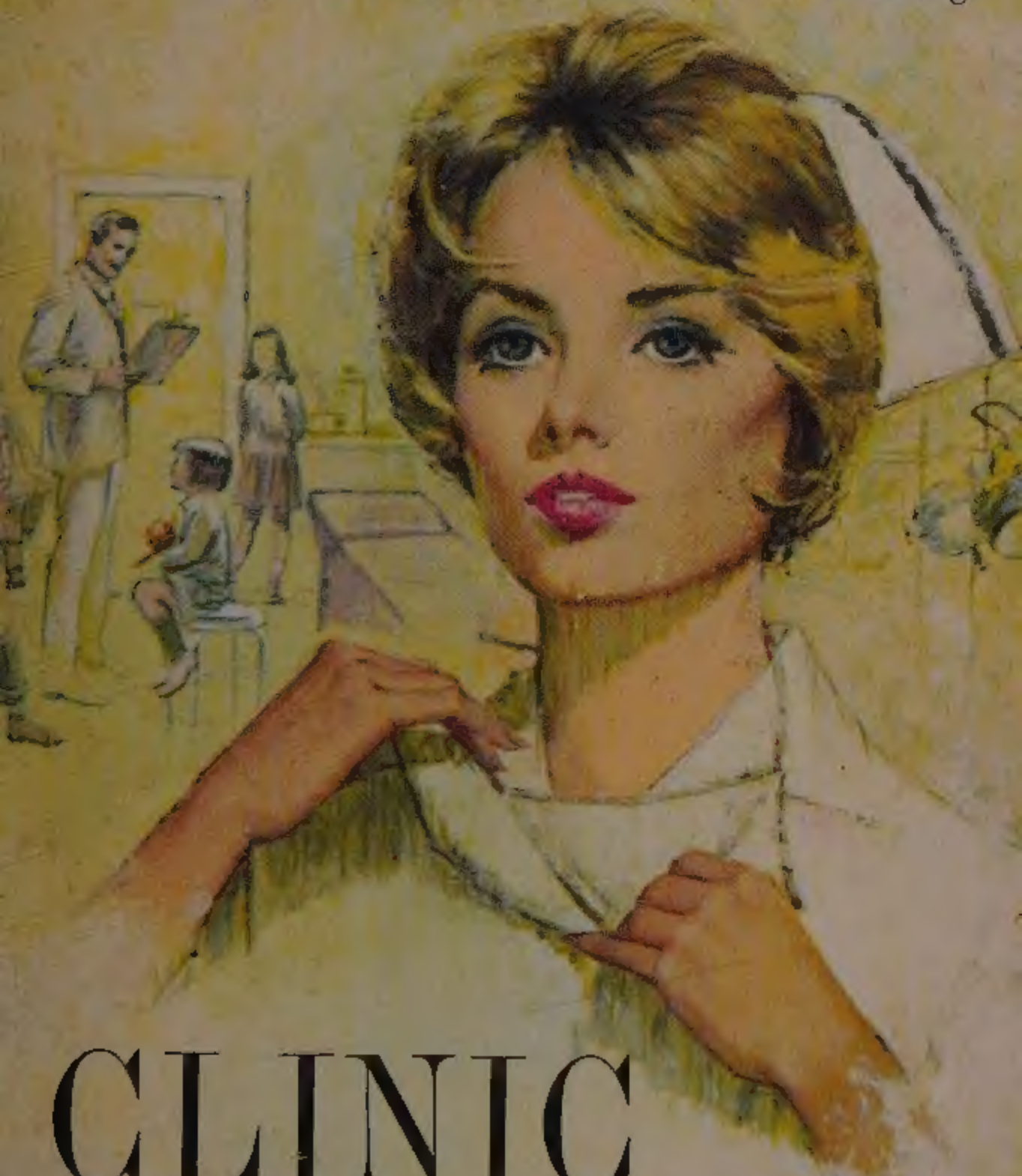
Young nurse Susan Randall puts her career ahead of material things.



CLINIC NURSE

ADELAIDE HUMPHRIES

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Clinic Nurse

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This book is most gratefully
dedicated to
Audrey Lester, Director of the
Palm Beach Crippled Children's Society

Chapter 1

Susan knew that it had been cowardly of her to postpone telling her mother that she was not going back to Meredith College for her senior year. Yet anyone knowing Mrs. Randall couldn't have blamed Susan very much.

And when Susan finally got around to telling her mother that she had enrolled at Columbia University for her final year—in order to take a course in Physical Therapy—Susan's mother reacted according to expectations.

"Columbia!" she exclaimed in a horrified voice. "But that's a coeducational school, Susan. Why would a girl like you want a diploma from Columbia when she could get it from one of the most exclusive women's colleges in the country? And what on earth is Physical Therapy?"

Susan's tone was patient. "It's the application of physical agents in the treatment of various diseases," she explained. "The process of restoring efficiency to a person who has become physically handicapped through disease or accident—or who was born that way."

She didn't expect her mother to grasp the idea immediately.

"I'm sure I don't know what you're talking about, Susan. You sound as if you're quoting from some textbook."

Susan had been quoting, not from textbooks, but from what she had learned so far in reading up on the course she had decided to take.

"It's a very specialized field of nursing," she said.

A pained expression came over Mrs. Randall's face and she leaned back against the cushions on the lounge and closed her eyes.

Mother really should have been an actress, Susan thought.

"How could anyone want to be a nurse?" Mrs. Randall had recovered from the shock enough to speak. "Performing the most menial tasks—changing beds, scrubbing up, waiting on all sorts of people."

"Nurses don't have to perform what you call menial tasks very much any more," Susan protested. "There are aides and orderlies for that, and a nurse is usually left free for the duties for which she is trained."

"But why would anyone want to be around sick people all the time? Listening to them moan and groan . . . and even watching them die."

Susan tried to explain that one of her reasons for choosing Physical Therapy was that in this field of nursing people were getting well, coming back to useful living, not dying. They were employing all their faculties toward regaining a normal way of life.

She wasn't at all sure that she could have become any other kind of nurse. Regular nursing required an exceptionally strong constitution, a detached attitude, an almost invincible armor. Besides, it took four years of training. And if you had already had three years of

college, by taking some additional science courses, a course in Physical Therapy could be completed within a year.

"But you'll have to wear a plain white uniform," her mother reminded her, thinking of all the lovely clothes hanging in Susan's closet. "You'll look like a waitress, or a beauty-parlor operator." Mrs. Randall sounded as though this would be a fate worse than death.

Susan, hiding a smile, told her that she would only be in uniform which she was working.

"Working" had been the wrong word to use.

Mrs. Randall closed her eyes again. "I can't bear," she said in a weak voice, "to think of you having to work for your living, Susan. I thought, after you graduated, I could manage a year for you in Europe. You'd be able then to hold up your end of the conversation when people discuss foreign countries. All the nice people, it seems, have been at least to Europe . . . And often, too, one makes such interesting acquaintances on shipboard."

"Mother," Susan said firmly, "I have no desire to go to Europe."

"You didn't want to go to college, either. At least you said you didn't, because you thought we couldn't afford it after your father died. And you must admit now that it was worth any sacrifice we had to make. You visited your classmates in their nice homes, met some very eligible young men." Mrs. Randall's main objective in life was to have her daughter make a good marriage.

Although, up to now, she had to admit that Susan hadn't co-operated in her aim. The truth was that Susan had shown no particular interest in any of the "eligible young men."

The only young man Susan had seemed to like at

all was a quite impossible person—practically a day laborer—whom she had met because he had relatives in the neighborhood.

Thank heaven, that brief affair had been brought to an abrupt end. Of course she was sorry that the young man had met with such a bad accident . . . but she just couldn't see all her dreams for Susan ending in her becoming the wife of a man like that.

"I hope I got more out of college than social contacts." Susan broke in on her thoughts. "I want to have a degree when I graduate that will guarantee my supporting myself—and paying you back for all you've spent on me."

"But all my sacrifices will have been in vain," her mother wailed, "if you don't graduate with your class. If, instead of marrying some nice young man from a good family, you bury yourself in a horrid, smelly institution."

It was useless to try to explain to her mother that she wanted to make a place for herself in the world; do something that would bring an inner satisfaction. There was plenty of time to think of getting married. Marriage was for the rest of your life, and Susan wanted to do something else with hers first.

At this moment, Gramps, who had made his home with Susan and her mother since his son's death, came into the room.

"What's the big rush about marrying off your daughter?" he growled, giving his daughter-in-law what he hoped was a fierce look.

Actually Gramps was a mild-tempered old gentleman. All he wanted was to be left alone with his pipe, which his daughter-in-law Agnes loathed and which he had to smoke in the privacy of his own room.

"I didn't say there way any hurry to marry Susan

off." Mrs. Randall assumed an aggrieved expression. Her father-in-law knew how much she depended upon Susan now that Susan's father was gone. It was only natural for a mother to want her daughter to make a satisfactory marriage. But her father-in-law, who could be surprisingly stubborn when it came to Susan or that awful pipe of his, wouldn't be able to understand how a mother felt.

"Well, then, what's all the fuss about?" Gramps settled himself in his favorite chair. Then he took out his pipe. He had no intention of lighting it, but it annoyed Agnes almost as much when he only had it in his mouth.

"Susan says she's not going back to college. At least not to Meredith—she's already enrolled at Columbia University. She says she's going to take up some kind of nursing." Her tragic expression would have been a credit to Bernhardt.

"Well, then, it looks as if that's what Susan will be doing." Gramps had to chuckle a little. Susan had been right smart to cross her bridges before they could be burned. "There's nothing disgraceful about earning an honest penny. Nursing is an honorable profession, whatever kind it is."

Susan felt a lump in her throat. She might have known Gramps would be on her side. Her mother had managed to make her feel so guilty that she had almost begun to regret her decision.

"But I haven't made all the sacrifices of the past few years to have them lead to this. I want the very best for Susan." Her mother wiped a tear from her eye. In a few minutes she would really begin to weep. Maybe that would make her daughter realize she was being selfish, which was not like Susan at all. It might even make her father-in-law stop roaring.

"Then if you want the best, you want her to be happy." Gramps clamped down on the end of his pipe.

He knew that among those many sacrifices, his daughter-in-law considered taking him into her home one of the biggest. She would never stop to think that he had made a sacrifice in giving up his comfortable bachelor quarters in a family-type hotel so that he could contribute to his son's family by "boarding" with them. Harvey Randall had left his daughter well fixed, with substantial life insurance, stocks and bonds. He had also drawn up his will so that the principal couldn't be touched, knowing that if his widow got her hands on the cash, she would go through it in short order, and there would be nothing left for Susan.

"Of course I want Susan to be happy!" The tears flowed freely enough now. How could this stubborn old man suggest that a mother would want anything else? But Agnes Randall had her own ideas as to what constituted happiness. Security, a group of friends from the right social set, a modern home in an exclusive suburb, a car, or possibly two, membership in the country club—all the things that would make life easy and pleasant.

"Only Susan can decide the definition of happiness for herself," her grandfather stated solemnly. "If she thinks hard work, doing for others, making her own way is the answer -well, it's up to her to follow it through."

Susan had gone over to her mother to try to console her. She wanted to put her arms around her, but her mother didn't like such demonstrations of affection. Or to have her perfectly waved hair mussed up. It always made Susan feel terrible to see her mother cry.

"I do have to do what I feel is right for me," she said. "And I'm afraid it's too late now, Mother, for me to change my mind. I've already enrolled, as I told you."

Mrs. Randall would never have dreamed that Susan, usually such a thoughtful daughter, could have been so cunning. Still, she had inherited some of her grandfather's stubbornness. And poor Harvey's quiet manner of carrying out his own decisions. There had been times, in spite of all the tears she could shed, that Agnes Randall hadn't been able to get around her husband.

"It won't be bad," Susan went on, striving to find words that would make her mother accept her change of plan. "I can come home every night, instead of for an occasional week-end, since I can commute." The Randalls lived in New Jersey—the Oranges—a modest brick house in a "refined" neighborhood, as her mother referred to the quiet street with its big trees that met overhead and its solid, two-storied dwellings. "That will cut down expenses for my senior year. Those are the reasons I chose Columbia. It had to be a college approved by the American Medical Association. There are others, of course—one in Boston, another in New Orleans, several in California."

"*California!* Surely, Susan, you wouldn't think of going so far away from home!"

"She just told you she wouldn't," Gramps cut in. "I reckon Susie knows this house would be a mighty dead place without her."

"Then, too," Susan went on, "I'm sure as soon as I get my degree, I can get a job not too far away from here. There's a big shortage of Physical Therapists everywhere—another good reason for deciding to go into this particular branch of nursing."

"Sounds like mighty good sense to me." Gramps

took his pipe out of his mouth and put it back in his pocket. There would be other scenes, but this one was about over, thank the Lord. Agnes Randall was tucking her lace-edged handkerchief back into her bosom. She knew when she was licked.

Gramps could almost forgive Harvey for marrying her, because of Susie. They didn't come any prettier than his granddaughter. But it wasn't just that Susie was the prettiest thing his old eyes had ever rested on; she was also the smartest. Some people claimed the present generation was wild, with rock 'n' roll and all, but if half of them were as smart as Susie, it was all right.

Mrs. Randall gave one last sigh. "I suppose I shall just have to try to resign myself to it, Susan. But it will take time."

Perhaps if Susan got a good position, she might meet some nice young doctor. A doctor was accepted socially whether he had a lot of money or not. And some doctors—especially the ones who specialized—made a great deal of money these days.

And when Susan met this doctor, she would forget that impossible young man whose aunt and uncle lived up the street. . . . As far as her mother knew, since Ray's accident, Susan hadn't been seeing much of him, anyway. Yet he might be the one to blame for Susan's sudden decision to become a nurse.

The more she thought of it, the more certain she was that Ray Farrell was behind Susan's sudden change of heart. But in her new work, the new life she had chosen for herself, Susan would surely forget all about him. She was bound to, her mother thought with satisfaction, when she met the handsome young doctor who had already become a real person to Agnes Randall.

Chapter 2

In a way, Susan's mother had been right in placing the blame for Susan's decision on Ray Farrell. Not that Susan had been satisfied before that. She had been plagued with a feeling that she didn't know where she was heading. She had acquired a smattering, as she thought of it, of knowledge: history, literature, a little psychology, Spanish and French. When she graduated from Meredith, what could she do? She wouldn't be qualified to hold down a position that demanded any special aptitude. Worse than that, she didn't know what she wanted to do.

Why, she wasn't even trained to work in an office in any capacity. Yet her mother had spent a lot of money on her education and Susan herself had been a good student, with better than average grades.

That was one of the things she admired most about Ray Farrell as she got to know him. Ray knew exactly where he was going. And he wasn't afraid to work hard in order to get there.

Her meeting with Ray hadn't been a romantic one. She had been doing the week-end marketing for

her mother, and when she came out of the supermarket, loaded down with brown paper pags, a young man had stepped up to relieve her of them. He carried them to the car, put them inside, and only then did Susan realize that he was not an employee of the store.

He was sandy-haired and blue-eyed, a bit on the stocky side. Far from the movie-idol standard. Yet there was something very attractive about him. Perhaps it was his little sideways grin, the way his eyes lighted up, an alertness that showed he was interested in everything and everybody.

"Thanks a lot," Susan said.

Again he gave her that grin that lighted up his whole face and made it, for the moment, extremely attractive.

"You don't know me," he said. "But I know you."

"You do?" Susan couldn't remember ever seeing him before. Of course, though, he wasn't exactly the type a girl would remember. Nor did he look like the sort of young man of whom her mother would approve. Which reminded Susan that her mother would not approve of her meeting anyone in this manner, either.

"Yes. I've been watching you for a long time, going into your house and coming out."

"Oh." Susan knew that she should get into the car and drive off, but for some reason she felt rooted to the spot. Besides, he had his hand on the door of the car.

"You see, my aunt and uncle live just up the street from you," he explained. "And sometimes I spend a few days with them. I've been waiting for a lucky break like this. To get to know you, I mean. I'm Ray Farrell, originally from Indiana, but working in New Jersey now. With the telephone company. I'm a trou-

ble-shooter—that is, right now I am. Eventually I'm going to be on the inside, supervising the kind of work I'm doing now."

"Oh," Susan said again. She didn't know what else to say.

"Now that I've introduced myself, Miss Randall —Susan—maybe you'd let me drop around sometime. We could go to a movie, or dancing—whatever you liked. Say, Saturday night?"

"I'm afraid . . ."

"Don't be afraid—I won't bite. And I'm not being fresh; honest, I'm not! If you knew how long it has taken me to get up the courage to speak to you . . . Please don't turn me down, Susan. You can have your mother call my aunt. She knows your mother—I think they met at some church benefit. They might have run into each other oftener, being neighbors, but Aunt Mary has her hands full, with five kids of her own and four grandchildren. Besides, she doesn't go in much for social things."

Then his Aunt Mary and her mother wouldn't have much in common, Susan could have told him. But she knew who his aunt was now. She had often watched people going in and out of the house down the street, noticed the cars parked in the driveway, heard the sounds of talk and laughter from within. She had rather envied that household.

However, she didn't recall having noticed this particular member of the Farrell family. And she wasn't at all sure that she should go out with him.

But in the end, after a little more persuasion on Ray's part, she had consented.

And Ray himself had broken that first date . . .

There had been a bad storm that Saturday, with torrential rain and high winds. And when the storm

finally abated, Susan had discovered that the Randall phone was out of order.

Naturally this made her think of Ray Farrell. And wonder again if she really should have told him that he could take her out this evening. It was such a bad night, she would just as soon have stayed at home.

When eight o'clock came and Ray had not shown up, Susan thought nothing of it. But when nine rolled around, she gave him up. He might have tried to telephone, but the line was still out of order. Or perhaps he had forgotten the date, or had just asked for a date to see whether Susan would give him one. On the other hand, he might have lost his nerve. Though that didn't seem at all like the brash young man who had helped her with her groceries.

It was unfortunate that the first time Mrs. Randall saw Ray he had to look so tired and dirty, his cover-alls soaked, his sandy hair disheveled. Susan's mother had thoroughly disapproved of him. He was definitely not the kind of young man she wanted for her daughter. And she used the fact that he hadn't shown up in time for his first date to try to convince Susan that she should never give him another one. The fact that, as Ray explained, it had not been his fault wasn't good enough.

Ray had had to work late, repairing the damage the storm had caused, and he had been unable to get in touch with Susan. He had felt so bad about it that Susan had agreed to make a date with him for the following week-end. And although he hadn't been dressed properly, she had insisted that he come in and have some hot coffee.

Their friendship had progressed rapidly from that time. The very fact that Mrs. Randall objected so strenuously to Ray might have had something to do with it.

Ray Farrell had a nice sense of humor. He was not ashamed of doing what Susan's mother called "day-laborer's work," and of being –again Mrs. Randall's words—"just plain middle class."

So many of the men Susan had met during those visits to the homes of her classmates, at parties and dances, had been used to having everything they wanted, with nothing much on their minds but fast sports cars, pretty girls, and having a good time. The sort of young men that Susan's mother would have picked for her.

And Susan preferred to choose her own friends—even her own husband.

Not that there was any romance between her and Ray. He said that he thought Susan was the nicest and prettiest girl he had ever met, but he added, "I've got a long way to go before I can afford to get serious with any girl."

And then Ray had had his accident, at the beginning of Susan's sophomore year.

Battling high winds and rain, Ray had lost his grip on a telephone pole, the spikes on his heels had failed to hold, and he had been hurled to the ground.

"I got off lucky," he insisted to Susan. "Could have broken my fool neck. What's a couple of busted legs?"

Susan thought they were bad enough. Multiple fractures of both legs meant being in a cast for months, wearing braces for some time afterwards, a long road of slow recovery. She didn't see how Ray could take it so bravely.

She was to marvel still further as time went on –as she visited Ray in the various hospitals to which he was sent, the last one a rehabilitation center.

And it was at the rehabilitation center that Susan

had first conceived the idea of becoming a Physical Therapist.

Mrs. Randall was no longer worried that her daughter might become too much interested in young Ray Farrell. It would be a long, long time before Ray could afford a wife. If ever. He had had to use crutches for a long period and now he walked with a cane. And of course there was no possibility of his going back to his old job of climbing telephone poles.

He didn't date Susan now, but Mrs. Randall knew that Susan saw him occasionally. Whenever he visited his aunt, Susan found some excuse to drop by and see him. She had become well acquainted with the Farrell family by this time and felt quite at home in the big, somewhat shabby old house.

"They have so much fun," she told Gramps. "They do everything together, as a unit. I wish I had brothers and sisters."

"I know what you mean," Gramps said promptly. "There was always a bunch of us at home—too many sometimes, I thought. But as we grew up, we went our different ways. A family like the Farrells is unusual. . . . What do you suppose Ray is planning on doing, now that he can no longer climb telephone poles?"

"Aunt Mary seems to think the company will make a place for him somewhere. But Ray says it won't lead to being a supervisor; he doesn't have enough experience." Susan felt heartsick because now Ray would never reach the goal he had set for himself. Yet she knew that he would make good at something, even if it did take longer.

Her grandfather evidently agreed with her. "He'll get along. That young man has what it takes. But why doesn't he come around any more, Susie?"

For a long time Ray hadn't been able to come by,

or ask Susan for a date. But now there was no reason for his staying away. And Susan had been wondering the same thing.

"I guess he just doesn't want to," she said.

"Fiddlesticks!" Gramps snorted. "It's not because he doesn't want to, I'm thinking. More likely it's because he does."

"What do you mean by that?" Gramps sometimes talked in riddles. Ray might be staying away because her mother had never made him feel that he was welcome. Still, that hadn't stopped him from coming to the house before his accident . . .

"He may see things in the same light as your mother now."

"As mother—but she and Ray certainly don't think alike about anything!"

"I reckon they do now. This young fellow may feel that he'll never have enough to offer you, Susie."

"But we're only friends!" Susan protested.

"Maybe so. For the present. But I doubt it likely that any young man in his right mind could keep on seeing you, Susie, and not want to be more than that."

"Ray always told me he wouldn't get serious about any girl. Not for a long time, anyway. And he knows I want to become a Physical Therapist—and so I have no intention of becoming serious about any man, either."

"The best-laid plans . . ." Gramps murmured, chuckling under his breath. Susie would learn in time that when love hit you between the eyes it knocked everything else you might have planned cockeyed. "I reckon the reason you decided to become one of those PTs was because knowing this young fellow set you to thinking about what you wanted to do with your life."

Chapter 3

Always in looking back, that year of training at Columbia went so fast it seemed incredible. The days were crammed full, with a heavy schedule from the time she got up until long after time to go to bed. The fact that Susan had to commute back and forth from New Jersey didn't help much, either.

She had to set her alarm for six every morning in order to make her train; catch the tube under the river; and then the crowded subway uptown.

Classes were from nine until four, with only a short break for lunch. She had nine minutes to spare when she got off the tube again to run for her train, and usually got home just in time to sit down to dinner. And after dinner Susan really burned the midnight oil.

"You're going to ruin your health and your eyesight," her mother would complain. "Keeping up such a pace. You'll kill yourself, Susan."

Susan would quote Gramps: "Hard work never killed anyone, Mother."

But there were times when she was to wonder if that were true. She was carrying a heavy schedule:

anatomy, neurology, psychology, and sciences, besides learning the practical end of therapy, how to use deep diathermy, short-wave, ultrasonic and infrared machines: she had to learn every muscle of the body and its functions and how to give massage and exercises, both active and passive.

Since the students practiced on each other, this took a lot out of one physically, so that, besides acquiring so much new knowledge, Susan was developing a strong back and deft hands.

"I never imagined anything could be so fascinating," she confided to Gramps. "Each problem is a challenge. I'm sure that physical therapy is the most interesting work anyone could do."

"Then you'll be one of the best," Gramps said. "That's half the secret of success, Susie, to love your work."

"The last months will be the most exciting." Susan had been looking forward to these months all during that first semester. "We get to put what we have learned into use; we work on actual cases at clinics affiliated with the school."

"Such as?" Gramps prompted.

"Vanderbilt, Neurological Clinic, The New York Hospital . . ."

"You don't mean that you will be working in a big hospital like that!" Mrs. Randall looked aghast. "Forgive me for saying so, Susan, but I certainly wouldn't want you to practice on me if I were a patient!"

"We'll always work under the supervision of a graduate therapist." Susan had to smile. She knew her mother would never believe that her daughter was capable of treating sick people. And of course there were times when Susan herself was dubious as to her ability.

She had never dreamed there would be so much to

learn. She wondered how she could ever remember all this newly acquired knowledge. She was a nervous wreck before every test and exam, but she managed to get excellent grades. That midnight oil paid off.

Her mother complained because Susan had no social life. She might as well have gone into a convent, she said. All work and no play wasn't good for anyone.

Susan said there would be plenty of time after she received her degree for fun and recreation. She didn't miss the good times she was passing up; she was much too busy. Besides, there was no one she wanted to date.

That handsome doctor, Mrs. Randall had to concede, remained only a figment of her imagination.

When pressed to give information about her classmates, Susan said not many men took up physical therapy. There were two in her class; one was married and had small children, the other was "spoken for," planning to marry as soon as he was graduated. As for the professors, most of them were quite "ancient."

For a while some of the men who had formerly dated Susan kept calling. But they gave up finally as Susan continued to turn them down. Her mother thought that Susan might as well have been as plain as the side of a board fence, instead of young and pretty and popular. She had strained her eyes so much that she had to get glasses for reading. She no longer had time to have her hair waved, or to roll it up at night, so she had it cut very short and wore it straight.

When her mother first saw her with all that beautiful blonde hair shorn, she had shed some real tears Susan, she thought, had sacrificed her chief claim to beauty. Mrs. Randall's own prematurely white hair was her pride. She would no more have missed her

weekly appointment at the beauty parlor—or gone to bed without a net to protect her waves—than she would have gone without eating.

Gramps insisted that his granddaughter looked as pretty as ever. "Prettier, if that were possible. Susie looks like a kid of sixteen. Besides, hair isn't meant to be all frizzy, not when nature intended it to be straight. And if it's comfortable, that's the main thing."

Naturally her mother also disapproved of the white cover-all that Susan wore to protect her clothes. It looked like a bag, hanging so straight from the shoulders to the hem; one of those ugly "sacks" the fashion designers were trying to put over on the public in order to create a new style.

"You look so different, Susan. No one would recognize you as the same girl!" her mother would lament. What worried Mrs. Randall was that when Susan eventually met that handsome young doctor he would not be attracted to her the way she looked now. She looked positively "frumpy," like the sort of girl who had always been a wall-flower and would never catch a husband no matter how hard she—or her mother—tried.

There was one young man who still thought Susan looked all right.

"Say, I like your hair!" Ray said the first time he saw her. "It looks like a shining golden cap."

Susan was glad he liked it. But if Ray still thought she looked all right—and his eyes seemed to say that he did even more than his words—why did he stay away, never stopping by the house even when he had to pass right by on his way to his aunt's, never asking Susan for a date?

They only saw each other when, as now, they met accidentally in the corner drugstore or on the street—or when Susan dropped in for a few minutes to say

hello to the Farrells, in the hope—to be perfectly honest that Ray might be there.

Ray asked her now if she would care for a Coke. And Susan said she would love one.

Over their Cokes, sitting at the counter, Ray explained that he was kept busy, too, with hardly any time for the things he would like to do. Susan hoped that was his way of saying he would like to see more of her. He explained that he was going to night school now that he was working again.

"I didn't know enough about any kind of clerical work to hope to keep the job the company made for me," he explained. "Never learned how to type, keep books, or file. So I made up my mind it was up to me to learn as much as I could about these things. Not that I want to be a bookkeeper, or file clerk, for the rest of my life," he added with that little sideways grin.

"You won't be," Susan assured him.

She thought it wonderful that Ray was going to night school. Especially since he still had trouble with his legs. His legs, Ray said, were a regular weather barometer, with their aches and pains.

"I'm not so sure." His grin was less cheerful this time, a bit on the rueful side. "I'll never be able to hold down a job that will keep me on my feet too much."

"You can use your head, instead." Susan had been thinking that Ray must look back with real nostalgia on the days when he could shimmy up a pole, walk miles, shoot a good game of golf, play baseball—in fact, take an active part in any available sport. In college, and during his stint with the Navy, Ray told her he had also gone in for boxing, claiming he had been fairly good at it, too, as an amateur, of course.

That explained why his stocky body had become

as hard as steel, with muscles any young man could boast about.

Looking at him, Susan suddenly discovered that Ray not only looked tired, thinner in the face, but he seemed to have lost that solid appearance that went with the outdoor athletic type. Naturally his face had not regained the healthy tan being out in all sorts of weather had given it; but now his skin was almost sallow and new lines were etched around his direct blue eyes and humorous mouth.

"I hope it won't be too hard on you, Ray." Impulsively Susan put a hand over his on the counter. "Working all day at a desk, at a job you don't especially like, then studying at night. It won't pay to break down your health, you know." Susan hadn't realized that she was giving him the same advice she had been hearing, and refusing to heed, from her mother.

"Oh, I guess it won't kill me." His face had colored up at the touch of her hand so that Susan had quickly withdrawn it.

Ray had never admitted how much his accident had changed his whole life; he accepted it as something he couldn't do anything about. But this didn't fool Susan.

"Maybe it won't kill you, but you ought to do something about getting so tired. You should keep on with your treatments, Ray."

She knew he no longer went to the Rehabilitation Center for treatments. He should not give up. More still could be done for those aches and pains; muscles toned up, circulation improved. Complete recovery from an accident like Ray's often took years.

"I haven't the time—or money." His answer was brief and decisive. "I'm lucky I can walk."

That was true. Susan was beginning to realize just

how lucky. There was a man to whom she had been giving treatments in one of the clinics who was much worse off than Ray. He had fallen from a scaffold and his spine had been injured. His lower extremities were paralyzed; he would never walk again.

Ray walked home with Susan, and she asked him to come in. But he quickly refused, saying he had to grab a bite at his aunt's house and then be on his way.

Susan, hurt, thought he could have spared another few minutes. Why didn't she admit to herself that Ray no longer wanted to be friends?

But in saying goodbye, he took one of her hands in his, his blue eyes looking earnestly into hers.

"You don't know what seeing you has meant to me, Susan!" There was no doubt as to the earnestness in his voice. "I'm glad you're so happy in your new work. And I hope—well, I hope that everything will work out just the way you want it."

She had told him about her work in the clinics during these last months before graduation. She had told him that she hoped to get a position in a clinic not far from home where she had already put in her application.

Yet his parting speech left Susan disquieted. It had sounded as though Ray never expected to see her again—even accidentally.

If he had meant what he said about seeing her meaning so much to him, then why wouldn't he see her again?

She thought of what Gramps had said. That Ray was staying away because he wanted so much not to. Gramps thought Ray was afraid of falling in love with her.

And there had been that moment when he had taken her hand and held it. Susan had experienced a feeling new to her. Once, when a little girl, she had

had an electric shock in turning off a light when her hands were damp. This feeling had been similar to that—frightening, yet exhilarating.

Maybe it wouldn't be too difficult for her to fall in love with Ray!

Chapter 4

Susan had looked forward to the end of her training period. Yet when graduation day actually arrived, she found herself filled with a mixture of emotions. Regret, because she would be parting with her classmates; anxiety because from now on so much responsibility would rest on her; satisfaction because she had passed all her examinations and tests with merit.

Gramps and her mother attended the graduating exercises, and both were proud of Susan when she received her pin. Although Mrs. Randall had to wipe away a tear or two when she thought that, had things been different, Susan would have been wearing a beautiful dress and carrying a bouquet of flowers, graduating with girls of the social standing her mother desired for her. She could have been starting off, afterwards, for Europe, instead of a position in that awful clinic where she would have to work so hard. Mrs. Randall couldn't understand why Susan should be so thrilled because she had "landed" that job. Her hours would be from eight until four; half day on

Saturdays. She still could live at home, but she would have the same arduous trip, first by train, then by bus. Then — and this was by far the worst thing in her mother's eyes—Susan would be classed as a working girl.

Susan tried to soften this by explaining to her mother that she now belonged to a profession that demanded the highest respect. Nursing was a career that not only brought financial security, but the reward of being useful and needed.

"Dear me," her mother said, "I should think the fact that I need you at home would be enough, Susan. And someday to be needed in your own home by your husband and children."

Her mother would never consider that her daughter had made a success of her life until she got her married off, Susan thought. An unmarried daughter, to Mrs. Randall, was like having a millstone around one's neck. She was marked as having somehow failed in the rôle of motherhood. It did not matter that there were large numbers of young women who preferred a career to being married. In the eyes of women like Susan's mother, they had not made a success of their lives.

Mrs. Randall was very much disappointed when she learned that the Director of the clinic where Susan was to be employed was a woman.

"I supposed the head of such an institution would naturally be a man — a doctor," her mother commented, her disappointment showing in her voice. When, oh when, would that handsome young doctor materialize?

In her imagination, Mrs. Randall had often heard herself confiding to the ladies of her bridge club that Susan had just become engaged to a brilliant young doctor whom she had met in her work. This had

helped lessen some of Mrs. Randall's chagrin at having actually to confess to these same ladies that Susan had decided to become some sort of nurse. Mrs. Randall could not bring herself to speak of her daughter as a Physical Therapist, or—heaven forbid!—a PT, as Susan referred to them.

"Miss Armstrong is a remarkable woman. She practically built the clinic from scratch. Started out as a Public Health nurse and became so interested in the underprivileged and handicapped children that she rented a small room so that she could give treatments.

"Gradually she got other people interested—civic groups, men's clubs. They leased a lot and procured one of those wooden barracks the Army was getting rid of after the war. People pitched in and helped paint and fix it up; a station wagon was provided to transport the children back and forth, and to use, when needed, as an ambulance. And Miss Armstrong kept right on working, giving unstintingly of her time and strength until she got the fine big building the clinic is in now."

"Do they only take children?" her mother asked. "And what about doctors? Surely there must be some doctors connected with the place if it's so big."

"They have associate doctors, of course; all treatments are given under doctors' orders. But they take adults, too. There's a staff now of twenty-some personnel." And, Susan marveled, she was to be one of them!

So there would be doctors whom Susan would meet and work side by side with in her new position. That was good. Something was bound to come of it. Weren't doctors always falling in love with nurses and marrying them? Mrs. Randall's hopes rose again.

"You said *Miss* Armstrong, didn't you, darling?

One would think that being associated, as you say, with so many doctors, she would have had opportunities—well, that would lead to something worth while."

"Worth while!" Hadn't that little sketch of Miss Armstrong's achievements convinced her mother that her life had been far more worth while than the average woman's? When you thought of all the unfortunate people she had helped, when you saw the modern, well-equipped clinic that had sprung from that small rented room . . . But, of course, Susan realized what her mother meant. "If you mean, Mother, has Miss Armstrong had opportunities for marriage, I'm sure she has . . . She's in her sixties now, but is still a handsome woman. She has very black hair, sparkling dark eyes, and a fine figure—and an all-embracing heart. The fact that she didn't marry doesn't mean her life hasn't amounted to something."

There were times when Susan felt so completely out of tune with her mother's thinking that she wondered how they could be mother and daughter.

She must remember that her mother's life had always been a sheltered one. She had come from a fairly well-to-do Southern family and had married when she was only eighteen, and Susan's father had always protected his wife from everything that might prove worrisome.

Susan decided, not for the first time, that she must be more like her father. He had been such a quiet man, so reserved, that in some ways Susan had never got really close to him. Yet he had always been there; a tower of strength to his family. When he died, Susan had been amazed at how much she missed him. The house had seemed much quieter, although he had come and gone so unobtrusively. They had never

had heart-to-heart talks, but now that this was no longer possible Susan wished with all her heart that she had gone more often to him for advice.

She realized that she missed her father perhaps more than she would have her mother. Mrs. Randall filled her days with bridge parties and other social affairs—she was Chairman this year of the Entertainment Committee of her Woman's Club—she loved to shop, and she spent her evenings watching television or talking over the phone.

Of course she didn't do her own housework—no Southern lady ever did; she had always had a part-time maid. But Mrs. Randall was an expert cook and enjoyed it.

Susan would never forget her first day at the clinic. She felt like a race horse at the post; she was so eager to get started. She would be working on patients without the supervision of another PT. She would be on her own, at last.

The clinic averaged about a hundred outpatients a day. There were six PTs on the staff, Susan being the youngest, and latest-comer to their ranks. There were two occupational therapists; a speech therapist; a clinical psychologist; several aides and orderlies.

Susan found that her schedule for that first day included only six patients. She knew that Miss Armstrong was being easy on her until she got into the swing. The other PTs had from eight to ten patients. Some treatments took longer than others; the average was between thirty and forty minutes.

Susan's first case was a sweet old lady who had suffered a cerebral-vascular accident. As in many such cases, the right side was involved and there also was some speech difficulty.

Susan wished she could have begun on a less dif-

ficult case; she even had some trouble in understanding what Mrs. Harriman was trying to say. She mumbled her words so that the sentences ran together. However, with the aid of gestures, Susan soon understood that her patient was trying to tell her that she looked too young—and so pretty—to be doing this sort of work.

Susan decided against admitting to Mrs. Harriman that she was her very first patient. And as soon as the old lady realized how gentle and patient the new young therapist was, she seemed satisfied. The treatment consisted of light massage and exercises. Then Mrs. Harriman would spend another period with the speech therapist. Her voice would be recorded on tape so that she could hear what she had said and detect her own mistakes. Her progress was very slow, but she was cheerful and co-operative.

"Part of the treatment," Miss Armstrong had told Susan in briefing her beforehand, "is to give encouragement. It is an important part of therapy. You will find it amazing the courage people have. But there are some who must have their morale boosted."

Susan's second patient fell into that classification. She was a middle-aged woman, a Mrs. Towner, and from the manner in which she was dressed, the airs she put on, Susan suspected that she was wealthy and used to having things go just as she wanted them.

"You're new, aren't you?" she asked when Susan came into the treatment room, after giving the patient time to undress and put on the white robe and be helped onto the table with the assistance of an aide. "Why isn't Miss Thatcher giving me my treatment this morning?"

"I believe Miss Thatcher's schedule was full," Susan answered politely, sizing this case up, as she had her first, with some trepidation. She doubted that

anyone would be able to please Mrs. Towner. Miss Armstrong had told Susan that she had decided this patient needed a change in therapists; Miss Thatcher had been working with her long enough. Susan added now, "Yes, I am new here. I'm Miss Randall. Shall we get started, Mrs. Towner?"

Mrs. Towner's left arm and hand were treated by submerging them in the Paraffin Tank—paraffin being used to enable the patient to stand more heat. Mrs. Towner had a mild form of arthritis in her hands.

"I suppose we might as well. Though I don't see what good these treatments are doing me. I wouldn't mind if I could see any improvement."

"Oh, I'm sure you have improved, Mrs. Towner." Susan tried to speak cheerfully. She thought that if Mrs. Towner would compare her case to others so much worse off than hers she wouldn't take that attitude. However, Mrs. Towner's entire manner proclaimed that she was the sort of person who believed no one was as bad off as she was.

"It's easy for you to say that!" she snapped. Then, as Susan carefully submerged her hand, "That's much too hot! I can't stand it so hot. Miss Thatcher got so she knew exacly how much heat I could take."

"The thermometer is set at the same temperature —one hundred and one—that Miss Thatcher used," Susan said patiently. "However, I can make it less, if you wish, Mrs. Towner."

This didn't keep the patient from continuing to find fault throughout the rest of the treatment.

When Susan asked if she would like to make an appointment for the last of the week, Mrs. Towner said she would make one so that the time would be kept open. "But unless I get to feeling better, I may

not keep it," she added in a tone that implied it would be Susan's fault if she didn't feel better.

"Why don't you come three times a week, instead of twice?" Susan suggested. "I could tell Miss Armstrong that you are discouraged."

"Miss Thatcher never cared whether I was discouraged or not." Mrs. Towner favored Susan with a brief, frosty smile. "Well, I'll give it a little more time—I must do something before my knuckles swell and ruin the looks of my hands!"

Susan reminded herself that she must not judge her patients or favor some more than others. There would be the cranky Mrs. Towners and the sweet little old Mrs. Harrimans. Susan must take each one in stride—and not let any one of them get under her skin.

After Mrs. Towner, Susan had a teen-ager who had been hurt playing football. The cast had recently been removed from the boy's leg and the ankle and knee were swollen and stiff. The treatment consisted of heat and massage, and again Susan found she had to try to build up the boy's morale.

"I guess I'll never play football again," Tom said. "Or by the time I can, I'll be too old to play."

Susan couldn't quite hide a smile. Tom was only sixteen. "I don't believe it will take that long, Tom. You still have a few years left. And if you don't play football, you'll do many other things you'll enjoy just as much."

"If you mean dancing and girls and stuff like that," Tom grunted, "you're all wet."

Susan knew he would get over those ideas, too, but instead of saying it, she told Tom about Ray.

"He sounds like a good Joe," Tom said. Then, after a moment of silence while Susan worked on

his leg: "Sounds like you're kinda sweet on him. Is he your steady, Miss Randall?"

Susan laughed, but she felt her face flush. "I haven't any steady, Tom."

"A girl as sharp as you! That's hard to believe."

Susan assured him that it was true. By the time Tom's treatment was finished, she felt that she had won the boy's liking and that, in time, he would not feel so frustrated.

After Tom, she had a man with a ruptured disc; then a housewife who was being given occupational therapy because she had to be in a wheelchair. She was very enthusiastic now because she was learning to do the daily household tasks in the rooms provided for this purpose in the clinic, and that was all she could talk about while Susan gave her her treatment in the Hubbard Tank. The fact that she would always be confined to a wheelchair because of the spine injury didn't seem to have dampened her spirits.

But out of all the cases Susan had that first day there was one that stood out -and in whom Susan couldn't help taking a special interest in spite of her resolution not to favor any particular patient.

Chapter 5

The patient who captured Susan's heart was Bitsey Crawford. She was a picture-doll little girl, with blonde curly hair, wide blue eyes, and dimples. She was "going on five." She had had polio the past summer.

The child was very apprehensive, as well as shy. She thought everyone, and everything, might hurt her. She was afraid that she would fall from the high treatment table, but most of all she was afraid when Susan put her in the pool. She clung to Susan as though she were going to drown her. She couldn't relax enough to respond to the passive exercises.

Susan told Bitsey to pretend that the frame she was lying on was a boat. With one arm to hold her for reassurance, Susan pulled the "boat" around in wide circles. Before long, she had the little girl smiling. When she let Bitsey get the best of her in a water fight —deliberately letting Bitsey duck her—the little girl's fears vanished. She knew she could trust Susan.

As time went on, Bitsey grew to love the time spent in the warm pool. The water gave her buoy-

ancy so that she was able to move her arm and leg; she had had a cross-involvement, her left leg and right arm becoming partially paralyzed.

"My daddy's going to have a swimming pool right in our back yard," Bitsey told Susan. "Won't that be fun? Daddy says he'll teach me how to swim and he says you can come play in my pool, too, Susan. You will come, won't you?"

"That would be fun." Susan did not commit herself.

"But that won't be till next summer or spring. I want you to come to my house before then, Susan. I want you to come real soon."

"Don't you see enough of me?" Susan said teasingly.

"I'd never see enough of you!" Bitsey vowed, nuzzling her cheek against the crook of Susan's arm that supported her head, keeping it above water. "I told my daddy I wished you'd come stay at our house all the time so I could play with you every day, Susan."

"That's a lovely wish," Susan agreed, "but I'm afraid it's one of the ones that can't come true, Bitsey. I have to stay here in the clinic, you know, to try to help other people, too. And I have a home of my own —my mother and Gramps. You know—I've told you about Gramps. Someday maybe you can come to visit at my house, too."

Susan had begun to wonder why Bitsey never talked about her mother. Everything was "My daddy."

Several times Susan had started to ask a question about the little girl's mother, but something had always held her back.

When she finally learned why Bitsey never mentioned her mother, Susan was glad she had remained silent.

"I'd like to visit your house," Bitsey said politely, "but I'd rather you came to mine. When could you come? My daddy said I could invite you any time and that Charles would come for you."

Charles was the Crawford chauffeur. He always brought Bitsey back and forth in the enormous black Cadillac from Morristown.

Judging by the car and chauffeur, Bitsey's "Daddy" must be quite rich. He must be too busy to come himself, although you would think he would want to find out how his daughter was progressing at the clinic. Again, it would be even more natural for the little girl's mother to take that interest. But no one but Charles had ever come to the clinic. He always sat outside in the car until Bitsey's treatment was over and it was time to come in and take her home.

Susan had decided that Bitsey must be a "poor little rich girl," and this made her want to help her more than ever. Yet it wasn't a good policy to become personally involved with any patient, keeping the patient-therapist relationship confined to clinic hours. Miss Armstrong had talked about this during one of the staff meetings held each week. Of course, the Director had added, there were exceptions to this rule.

"Oh, I'll come to visit you sometime," Susan said, hating to be evasive with Bitsey. "But you see, I'm kept so busy at the clinic that when I'm not working there are many other things I have to do."

Bitsey's blue eyes clouded with disappointment. "Grownups are always busy. My daddy works hard, too. It's usually so late when he gets home at night that I'm asleep. But he always tiptoes in to kiss me good night, and sometimes I'm awake. He told me he has to be away next Sunday, too. I thought you might come then— Oh, Susan, couldn't you please?"

It was difficult to refuse the beseeching look in the blue eyes. Now that Bitsey couldn't run and play with other children, she must often be very lonely. It was too bad her father couldn't spare her more time, since she adored him so.

"Maybe if I go for a ride with Gramps and my mother, as we often do on Sunday afternoons, I could have them drop me off at your house for a little visit, Bitsey."

She was rewarded by a brilliant smile. "Oh, will you—honest and truly, Susan?"

"Honest and truly." Susan was committed now.

"Will you stay long enough so that I can show you all my things—and maybe have a tea party?"

"I'll try," Susan promised. She would have to ask Charles for directions to Susan's home. Morristown wasn't too far from the Oranges.

Maybe, Susan decided, upon further reflection, she would take the car herself, rather than have her mother and Gramps drop her off.

She didn't know what had caused her to change her mind about this, but when, the next Sunday, she drove up the curving driveway that led to the Crawford residence she was glad she had.

Susan's mother would probably have insisted on going in with her. Mrs. Randall would never pass up the opportunity to see inside such a lovely house. The place was actually an estate, with beautifully kept grounds, formal plantings and trees, in which the big white house was set like a jewel. Bitsey's daddy must be very rich indeed.

Charles opened the door for her, his usually sober face wreathed in smiles. "Do come in, Miss." He held the door wide. Beyond him, she could see a gracefully curving staircase leading up from the spacious hall-

way, the thick pile of Oriental rugs, oil paintings on the walls, archways opening into other rooms. "Miss Bitsey was afraid you might not come. She's expecting you. She's waiting upstairs in her rooms."

Following him, Susan wondered how Bitsey could manage the curving stairs. She was learning to walk again, but her left leg had to be supported with a brace.

Charles answered this unspoken question. "I offered to carry Miss Bitsey down to greet you, but she wanted you to see her own rooms—her dolls and toys. And Anna—she's my wife and the housekeeper here—is fixing tea for a little party. Miss Bitsey wanted it served upstairs."

"That will be nice." Susan was glad she had come. Yet she felt a bit awed in such surroundings. Poor little Bitsey must feel very small in this big house. The house was very quiet, too. One could hear the sound of Susan's high heels on the polished stairs.

Charles led the way down another long hall. The doors on either side were closed until they came to Bitsey's room. It was a large sunny room, filled with hothouse flowers, and gay with fairytale murals painted on the walls.

Bitsey came from another room that had a huge canopied bed with so much pink net and ruffles that it might have belonged to a princess. And the child, dressed all in pink, too, a ribbon in her blonde curls, really looked like a princess.

"Oh, Susan, you did come! You did come!"

Had the child thought that Susan wouldn't keep her word? What had happened to her to cause her to lose trust in people?

Impulsively Susan put her arms around Bitsey and drew her close. "Of course I came, Bitsey. I told you I would. My! Just look at all those beautiful dolls—

and a dollhouse almost big enough for a little girl to live in!"

This was true; the dollhouse was a replica of a tiny cottage and stood at least five feet high. It was furnished like a real house, too, even to the bathroom and kitchen.

"Do you like it, Susan? My daddy got it for me as a surprise when I came home from the hospital. When summer comes, he's going to have it moved outdoors near the new pool."

"That will be fun. Then you can pretend you live in it and you can be out of doors most of the time. Will you introduce me to your family of dolls, Bitsey?"

Bitsey, delighted, made a ceremony of it.

By the time Susan had examined and exclaimed over each one of them, tea was ready to be served on a low table in front of the windows, overlooking the garden. Charles had brought in the tea service, and now Anna brought in a silver tray containing enough sandwiches and cakes for a dozen guests.

Everything is done on much too lavish a scale, Susan thought.

All this time, she had been wondering about Bitsey's mother. She had thought there might be a portrait of her in the little girl's room, but there wasn't.

"You make such a gracious hostess, Bitsey, you must have tea parties often. Do your little friends bring their dolls over to play in your lovely dollhouse and do you invite the dolls to your tea parties, too?"

It had been Susan's idea to place a doll on the other two chairs so there would be four around the table.

"I don't have any little friends," Bitsey said, her blue eyes clouding.

"Oh, surely you must have some!"

"There aren't many children in the neighbor-

hood," Anna, returning with more hot tea, said. "Miss Bitsey's cousins come to visit now and then."

"But they are boys! They won't play with dolls. I did have a friend, but she moved away while I was in the hospital. You're my girl friend now, Susan. I don't really want anyone else."

Susan thanked her, but she thought again how lonely the big house must be for the child. All the things her wealthy daddy could buy for her couldn't make up for the lack of playmates.

Because of this, Susan stayed longer than she had planned, and when the time came to leave, she found herself promising to come again sometime soon.

She had had an idea. But she wouldn't mention it to Bitsey until she had talked it over with Miss Armstrong. And perhaps then it should be proposed first to Bitsey's parents.

It was a shame for one little girl to be confined to upstairs rooms in a big house with only two elderly servants for companionship. It was, in Susan's opinion, a crime.

One would think, she said to herself as she got into the Plymouth, that Bitsey's daddy at least would realize how lonely a little girl could be.

Susan found herself wishing that she could give Bitsey's father a good talking to.

Maybe she should have chosen a time to visit when he was at home. How else could she get to meet him? He never came to the clinic. Bitsey's lonely situation wasn't good for the little girl; it would delay her recovery.

As Susan started to drive away, another car swept up the drive and stopped in front of her, blocking the driveway. It was one of those low foreign sports cars. A young man was behind the wheel.

He jumped out and came toward her.

Chapter 6

"You must be Susan," he said.

Now that he stood by her car, Susan saw that he was an incredibly handsome young man. He must be around thirty, she decided. He had dark hair and heavy dark eyebrows, under which were the bluest eyes imaginable. His skin was a deep tan and, in contrast, his teeth were very white when he smiled. He was over six feet tall, well built, and he had what Susan's mother would instantly have called an "aristocratic air."

"Yes, I am," said Susan, wondering how he knew who she was.

"I'm glad I got here before you left. I didn't think I could make it. Drove like the dickens from Connecticut."

"I was just leaving," Susan said unnecessarily.

"I wanted to have a talk with you." He flashed his white smile again. "This will do better than inside, because I want to talk to you about Bitsey. You see, I'm her father."

"You are?" She had been dumb. Still, how could

she have guessed that Susan's "Daddy" would look like this young man? "I thought you were away." That also was a stupid remark, Susan realized the moment she had said it. He had just explained that he had driven from Connecticut.

"I had to spend the week-end with a business associate. But when Bitsey told me you were coming, I planned to get back to talk with you. May I get in your car for a few minutes?"

Without waiting for Susan's reply, he strode around the Plymouth, opened the door, got in beside her.

Well, she had been wanting to have a talk with him, too, hadn't she? This was as good a time as any. "I can spare a few minutes," Susan said. "But I did stay longer than I intended . . ."

This wasn't strictly true. She had no plans for the evening. She hadn't told her mother or Gramps when she would be home. But Susan thought it wouldn't hurt to put this young man in his place. Climbing in beside her before she could say yea or nay. He reminded her of the young men she had met during her first years in college—the kind of young man her mother approved of wholeheartedly.

"I suppose you have a date." He gave her his flashing smile again. "I won't keep you long, Susan. You don't mind, do you, if I call you Susan? I hear nothing but Susan this and Susan that every day. Bitsey has fallen in love with you."

"Bitsey is a dear little girl. . . . And a very lonely little girl, I'm afraid."

"Lonely? Well . . . I suppose she is at times." His voice betrayed some surprise. "But I do everything I can for her. There's nothing I wouldn't do for Bitsey."

Nothing you wouldn't buy for her, Susan wanted

to correct him. He could, she was sure, give his little girl more of his time; he could give more thought as to what would really make her happy.

"It's been difficult for me," his blue eyes clouded, as Bitsey's did at times, "since her mother went away." He was silent for a long moment. Then, abruptly, "Tell me, Susan, does Bitsey ever mention her mother?"

His blue eyes wore an expression now that Susan had never seen in Bitsey's; they were blue ice, as hard as steel.

"No—Bitsey has never mentioned anyone but you. You seem to be her whole world." By saying that Bitsey's mother had gone away, did he mean that she had died? But if Bitsey's father had loved still loved—her mother, why hadn't he kept her memory alive with Bitsey? Why had there been no sign of a mother's touch in the child's rooms?

"That's good. I hoped Bitsey was too young at the time to realize what had happened."

He still didn't say that his wife had died, and Susan did not like to ask.

However, this was not, Susan felt sure, what Bitsey's father had wanted to talk with her about.

"What did you wish to speak to me about, Mr. Crawford?" The professional tone Susan adopted would remind him that she did not have all day to sit here in his driveway. She would like to drive home before it got too dark; traffic on Sunday evenings was usually heavy.

"I wanted to ask how Bitsey is progressing."

He could have come to the clinic for that and seen for himself. Most fathers would have.

"She is doing quite well," she said stiffly. "She is very co-operative, now that she's no longer so apprehensive."

"Bitsey told me how you made a game of her treatments. She really enjoys them, especially the pool. I suppose she has told you I intend to have a pool installed in the back yard this spring. Do you think that's a good idea, Susan?" His eyes were smiling again, looking down into hers. He seemed to be trying to win Susan over to his way of thinking.

"I guess it is." She wasn't too enthusiastic. A pool would be nice, but what good would it be to splash and play in it unless there were others to enjoy it with you? It was never much fun to do anything by yourself.

If he sensed some restraint in her reply, Bitsey's father chose to overlook it. "I promised Bitsey I'd teach her to swim—when I have time. And, to be honest, I hoped I could persuade you to come over and share the pool this summer. Naturally, I would pay you, the same as though it were a pool treatment at the clinic . . ."

"I'm sorry," Susan interrupted, and she felt no pangs about speaking her mind now, "but you couldn't pay me, Mr. Crawford." Did he think he could buy her services as though she were, say, another servant?

Once again his tone was apologetic, or at least, he was on the defensive. "I thought it would be a good idea for Bitsey to have a pool treatment every day—spend some time in the pool, anyway. And she's taken such a fancy to you that you seemed to be the logical person. Also, she told me you said you would come when the pool is ready. She's counting on it so much, I hope you won't disappoint her."

"I shall be glad to come, when I can. I don't have too much free time, Mr. Crawford. Most of my time is taken up at the clinic."

"I understand. I suppose I have taken up too much

of your time now. But you must know how concerned I am over Bitsey. It is still inconceivable to me that this has happened to her. You know, I blame myself because I hadn't seen to it that Bitsey had the Salk vaccine. I thought that could wait until she started to school."

"Too many parents think that. But you mustn't blame yourself, Mr. Crawford," she added in a more gentle tone.

"It has preyed on my mind. It's another reason I'm determined to make it up to Bitsey in every way."

Then give her more of your time, Susan wanted to say. Instead, she said, "I am sure there are many ways in which you can make it up to Bitsey."

"But why should this happen to my little girl?"

"Why should it happen to any child?" It was an answer Susan had heard given to other bewildered parents who forgot that there were many other children besides their own who had suffered some great tragedy.

"I suppose that is true. . . . But Bitsey's so little. Will she always have to wear that brace? Will she never run and play like other children, dance and enter into sports activities, as she grows up?"

The look of agony in his blue eyes made Susan wish she could give him the answer he wanted to hear.

"I don't know. I don't suppose anyone does, not even Bitsey's doctor. But you must never give up hope or let Bitsey give up hope."

"You said that you thought Bitsey was a lonely little girl," her father said. "It's true she doesn't have many playmates. Perhaps in another year or so I can send her away to a good private school. She's a bit too young now."

"Bitsey is too young to be sent away from home," Susan agreed. When Mr. Crawford spoke of selecting a school for his daughter, he had sounded just like Susan's mother. He had also brought up the same idea that had occurred to Susan earlier. "But there are day schools for preschool children. In fact, we have one at the clinic."

"You do?" Bitsey's father took time to consider the idea; then he shook his head. "I assume the children are all handicapped, or crippled, in some way."

"Yes, they are." but so was his Bitsey, even though he still refused to acknowledge it. "Children prefer to be with children who are like themselves."

"But what kind of children are they? I mean, they must come from all kinds of environments."

"Not many of them come from a fine home like Bitsey's," Susan conceded. "Quite a few are charity cases. But they are very nice children. And again, the children themselves do not seem to mind these differences."

"I suppose you are right." His tone was a bit begrudging, as though he realized he had received a rebuke. "Are you suggesting that I let Bitsey go to the preschool in your clinic?"

"That wouldn't be up to me." Susan had intended speaking about this matter first to Miss Armstrong. But when Mr. Crawford had given her such a good opening, she couldn't let it pass.

"Naturally, I would have to think it over."

"Bitsey's doctor would have to recommened it. And Miss Armstrong, our Director, would have to approve. The number of children has to be limited, of course."

"I see." Apparently he was beginning to realize that there were other requirements besides his ap-

proval. "If Bitsey could attend this pre-school, do you, as her Physical Therapist, think it would be good for her?"

"I think it would be *very* good for her." Susan did not hesitate in saying this. Bitsey needed to be with other children; she needed to learn to trust other people. "After school in the mornings, there is a lunch period, then they take a nap in a room provided for that purpose before they have their prescribed treatments. This makes a full and busy day."

Apparently Susan's answer was convincing enough that Bitsey's father no longer felt he should think it over. "I'll consult Dr. Lowman and persuade him to advise that Bitsey be admitted to the clinic school. Perhaps you could help, Susan, by taking the matter up with your Director and gaining her consent."

"I'll be glad to." Susan felt confident that when she presented the facts to Miss Armstrong she would agree that Bitsey should be among the selected number. Susan also believed that Bitsey's doctor would offer no objection but would give his full approval.

"I don't know how I can thank you," Bitsey's father said, his blue eyes smiling deeply into Susan's.

"Please don't try." She let her glance drop before his. There was no need to make it a personal matter. Any good physical therapist would have taken the same interest in a patient.

"I'll try to find some way." His tone was earnest. Then, more lightly, "Do you have any other suggestions, Susan, as to what I can do to make Bitsey happy?"

Susan could have told him that he could give his little girl more time, more of himself, but she thought she had said enough for the present.

"I'm afraid no one can buy happiness," she said.

"Nobody knows that better than I do." His eyes were ice-blue once more, his tone bitter.

Susan supposed he was thinking about his wife. If she had been dead for some time, and he had said that Bitsey had been much younger when her mother "went away," one would think Mr. Crawford would have become more resigned to his loss by now.

Naturally this was something else Susan couldn't say to him. As it was getting near dusk, she really should go. Besides, they had had their talk, each having said what he had in mind.

"I really must be getting started," Susan said again. "It's growing late . . ."

"And I'm keeping you from that date! But you haven't said when you'll come again—remember you said Bitsey was lonely. How about making it next Sunday?"

"I—I really don't know. I'll come again—sometime."

He had got out of the car, but he still stood there and his car blocked the driveway. "You must make it soon—and often. Thanks again for everything, Susan." He reached out and took her hand.

Susan was obliged to shake hands with him but she withdrew her hand as quickly as possible.

He was a rich young man, as well as an exceptionally handsome one. And socially, far above a girl who worked for her living.

Good grief! Susan caught herself up sharply. She was thinking just like her mother!

You'd think I might be afraid I'd fall for the man, she thought. What was wrong with her? She was not going to fall in love with any man.

Chapter 7

When Susan got home, Gramps told her that Ray had stopped by.

Her mother hadn't mentioned this; she had questioned Susan about her visit, but Susan hadn't had much to say. She told briefly about the dollhouse and described the big house. She didn't mention that she had met Bitsey's father.

Her mother might get ideas. A rich widower would be a marvelous catch for her daughter. Almost as good as the doctor her mother was always talking about—and whom Susan had never met. Not that she hadn't met some doctors in her work at the clinic, but, as she had tried to impress upon her mother, all of them were either married, engaged, or old enough to be Susan's father. This hadn't caused her mother to give up hope that one day a young, handsome, well-established doctor would show up. And of course he would be "taken" with Susan and eventually want to marry her.

The fact that Susan didn't want to marry anyone—

not for several years, anyway didn't stop Mrs. Randall from spinning her daydreams.

"I never heard of a young girl who didn't want to be married!" her mother would protest. "It's unnatural, Susan. You just don't know what you're talking about—every girl wants to be married. Just wait until Mr. Right comes along!"

Nevertheless, as time went on, and the handsome doctor did not materialize, Mrs. Randall began to get worried, almost to the point of despair. Until the thought struck her that, since there was no doctor, there might very well be a patient who would take his place.

A quite prosperous and eternally grateful patient whom Susan had helped to get well—and who, naturally, would have fallen madly in love with his Physical Therapist.

Wasn't this always happening? It was only natural for a man patient to fall in love with his nurse. It happened every day.

Yet when her mother pressed Susan for information regarding the patients to whom she gave treatments, there didn't seem to be any such possibility among them.

Susan spoke of a Mrs. Towner who was rather fussy but with whom Susan managed to get along fairly well; there was an old lady of whom Susan appeared to be quite fond because she was so patient about her troubles. When Tom Wilcox's name first came up, Mrs. Randall pricked up her ears. But it turned out that he was only a boy. Susan was giving him mat work in the gym, besides his treatments, and she said that that was fun and that Tom was much more encouraged about his future than he had been. And then, of course, there was this little girl, Bitsey, whom Susan was always talking about. Her family must be

wealthy, Mrs. Randall decided, even before she heard about the Crawfords' beautiful home. But there couldn't be any romantic angle in this direction, since naturally the child already had a mother.

"Did you meet Mrs. Crawford, darling?" Susan's mother asked.

"Oh, no. She's—" Susan started to say that she was dead, but changed this, on second thought, to the way she had heard it. "She's gone away."

"Well, no doubt you'll meet her someday. The father, too. It might be a good thing to cultivate Bitsey's parents, Susan. They must have lovely friends." And among them, some eligible young man. Mrs. Randall did not have to tack this on; it was obvious what she meant.

When Gramps told her, later on, that Ray had stopped by and had seemed disappointed that Susan had not been at home, she decided to walk down to his aunt's.

She hadn't been there for some time, carrying out her resolution to stay away, for fear that Ray might think she was running after him. If he had broken the ice and come to see her, Susan would go the other half of the way. He might still be at his aunt's home. Sunday evenings there was usually a large family gathering.

There was, this Sunday. Grandchildren all over the place—the girls helping in the kitchen, the men arguing over current events and politics, as men always did.

"Where have you been keeping yourself, dear?" Mrs. Farrell reproached Susan gently. "We've missed you. Ray will be so sorry he missed you this time. He had to leave early today. In fact, you just *missed* him by about ten minutes."

Susan didn't know why she felt so disappointed.

"I've been working pretty hard," she said.

"I'm sure you have, dear. You like your work?"

"Love it! It's so interesting. You feel as though you are accomplishing something very worth while."

"That's good." Mrs. Farrell had settled her somewhat bulky figure in her favorite rocking chair, gathering one of the younger grandchildren into her ample lap. "Ray's been working very hard, too. I'm worried about that boy. He's lost so much weight, and when he's tired he walks with a sort of limp, dragging his bad leg and foot. Such a pity!"

"It is indeed." Again Susan found herself wishing that something more could be done for Ray. And why couldn't it? She could speak to Miss Armstrong. The clinic often took patients who couldn't afford to pay, or who could only pay in part. In fact, no one was ever turned down for that reason. "I wish you could get Ray to come to the clinic." Susan leaned forward eagerly. "I told him that he shouldn't give up his treatments. He said he couldn't afford them, or spare the time, but it's so important. I wish you'd talk to him, Aunt Mary. He'd listen to *you*."

Mrs. Farrell smiled. Because she had neglected her figure and her looks, Susan's mother considered Mrs. Farrell a dowdy woman, but Susan thought that Ray's aunt had one of the sweetest faces she had ever seen. When she smiled, it was like receiving a benediction.

"What makes you think he wouldn't listen to you, Susan?"

"Well, it's just that . . . something seems to have come between us. We were such good friends." Susan hadn't intended to make this confession, but it was easy to say what was in your heart to Mary Farrell.

"Do you feel the same toward Ray as you did?"

"Of course! Why shouldn't I?"

"Some girls wouldn't, Susan. Ray's prospects aren't quite so bright now. That accident changed his whole life. At least Ray feels that it has."

"But he shouldn't feel that way."

"I don't mean he's ever said he does. But I've suspected it from various things. And now with you telling me that something's come between you to spoil your friendship, I'm sure that must be why, Susan. Ray thinks it wouldn't be fair to you to take up too much of your time."

"But the fact that Ray may never set the world on fire shouldn't change the way I or any girl—would feel toward him," Susan protested.

"And how do you feel toward him, dear?"

"Well, I still like, and admire, Ray very much. But that doesn't necessarily mean I would fall in love with him. Or he with me. I don't see why a man and a girl can't just be good friends."

"There are quite a number of reasons." The older woman smiled knowingly. "You see, my dear, love is something that just happens. My advice to you, Susan, is to let Ray know that, on your part at least, nothing has changed."

"I want to be friends. I don't want to stop seeing him. But I don't want Ray to think I'm—well, running after him, either."

"I doubt very much if he'd think that. And I'll talk to him, Susan—see if I can't persuade him to come to your clinic. That should solve this other problem, too."

His aunt meant that then, naturally, they would have to see each other.

Susan felt better after her visit. She always felt better after she had been with the Farrells.

It had been a wonderful evening, Susan thought—then smiled to herself, remembering that Mr. Craw-

ford had thought she had a date. Most likely, he would consider the homey sort of evening she had just spent very dull indeed.

But, again, why should she care what Mr. Crawford thought?

She wouldn't see him, or be able to visit Bitsey, the following Sunday. Before she had left, Aunt Mary had invited Susan to come again next Sunday. She said it was to be a wedding-anniversary party—her oldest daughter's and that she would have had that talk with Ray before then. Ray would be there; Susan must come. It would be the first step toward restoring their old friendship.

Chapter 8

Susan may have thought she wouldn't see Mr. Crawford again soon, but when Bitsey came for her treatment on Tuesday her father brought her instead of Charles.

"I'd like to watch Bitsey take her pool treatment —that is, if you don't mind, Susan." He had greeted her with that same deep smile from those incredibly blue eyes, and in his dark business suit Mr. Crawford was handsomer, if possible, than she had remembered him.

Susan already had her swim suit on, and for some reason she felt slightly embarrassed. Maybe because those blue eyes had swept so admiringly over her trim figure.

"I guess it will be all right," she said. "Sometimes it makes a patient self-conscious. But I don't suppose Bitsey will mind."

One of the aides was getting the little girl ready.

"While we wait, perhaps you'd show me around the clinic," Bitsey's father suggested. "It looks like an interesting place."

Susan's schedule wouldn't have permitted this even if she had been dressed for a tour of inspection. "I'll be glad to have someone show you around," she said, "but I have to check with my last patient before I start with Bitsey. So if you'll excuse me, Mr. Crawford . . ."

"Certainly. But before you go—have you spoken to your Director about Bitsey attending the preschool? I called Dr. Lowman and he's very much in favor of it. I was hoping Bitsey might start this week."

"I'm sorry, but I haven't had time to talk with Miss Armstrong. Why don't you speak to her yourself, Mr. Crawford?. Since Dr. Lowman approves, I'm sure Bitsey will be able to start as soon as there's an opening."

Susan spoke as impersonally as she could. She still felt very self-conscious, which was ridiculous, of course. Mr. Crawforcd had seen plenty of girls in bathing suits. It was just that the background—they were in the hallway that led to the treatment rooms, just off the waiting room—was not at all like a pool or a beach.

Why hadn't Bitsey's father waited in the other room, where he was supposed to? It was like him to barge in as though he owned the whole institution. Miss Bancroft, the receptionist, hadn't been on her toes, or she would have caught him. Or maybe he had won her over with that disarming smile and those good looks.

"I can't spare too much time, I'm afraid. I'll have to leave as soon as I've watched Bitsey's treatment. Perhaps the tour of inspection had better be postponed, as I'd prefer you for my guide, Susan. And if you can find time to talk with your Director before tomorrow, I'd appreciate it." His eyes smiled into hers again, and Susan found it difficult to look away.

If she hadn't already given her word to take the matter of Bitsey's schooling up with Miss Armstrong, she would have backed out now, since there really was no reason why Mr. Crawford couldn't have gone directly to Miss Armstrong. But of course there was Bitsey to be considered. Susan might be better able than Mr. Crawford to explain why Bitsey especially needed the advantages the school had to offer.

"I'll talk with Miss Armstrong today," she promised, starting to turn away.

Mr. Crawford said again, "I don't know how to thank you, but as I told you, I'll find a way somehow. You can let me know about the school tomorrow, Susan."

Did he mean he was going to start bringing Bitsey to the clinic every day?

Well, that was one other thing she had wanted for the child—her father to give her more of his time. But was that his reason for relieving the chauffeur of this duty?

Susan told herself she was being silly even to think that Mr. Crawford was making an excuse to see her again. She knew better than that. Despite that look in his eyes that she couldn't quite define, she knew that she hadn't "bowled" Mr. Crawford over. He was only trying to charm her for Bitsey's benefit.

Susan was acutely conscious, all during Bitsey's treatment in the pool, that she had an audience. Yet she was used to having people watch. While in training there had always been a group of other students, and among them a graduate therapist and sometimes a doctor. This had never bothered her. Any more than it bothered her now when there were other patients receiving treatments in the clinic pool at the same time she was giving one.

Today Bitsey and her therapist had the pool all to

themselves. And the little girl was delighted that her father was a spectator. She was so proud to be able to show him how well she could do.

"See how I can kick, Daddy! Just watch!"

Her father assured her that he was watching. He said he was amazed that she could move her bad leg so easily. And her right arm—why, no one would think there was anything wrong with it. "You'll turn out to be a champion swimmer, Bitsey!"

Bitsey had a surprise for him at the end of the treatment. Susan had already begun to teach her a few fundamentals of swimming. How to take long, deep breaths, to duck under water without holding her nose. Bitsey had conquered all her fear of water, thanks to Susan.

Her father evidently realized this. Before he left, he told Susan that Bitsey was lucky to have such a good therapist. "I don't know how you can have so much patience." His eyes held that look of admiration again. "I've never met a woman before who had an over-supply of that commodity. But then, I've never met anyone like you, Susan."

Susan thought his remark—and the look in his blue eyes—was much too personal, so she murmured a polite, but cool, thank you, beckoned to an orderly, who had just brought another patient in on a stretcher, and asked him to take Bitsey back to a dressing room.

"Don't run away." The look in Mr. Crawford's eyes held her against her will. "Are you coming out to see Bitsey Sunday?"

"I'm sorry," Susan was glad she had an excuse ready, "but I have other plans. An engagement I couldn't possibly break." She was dripping water from her blue suit, a little pool forming at her feet. You would think the man would realize she wanted

to change. She took off the white cap that covered her short blonde hair. Sometimes she didn't wear one, but as Bitsey got so much fun out of splashing her, a cap was a protection.

"I'm sorry, too," Bitsey's father said. "Bitsey has a birthday next week and I thought we could celebrate. It's Wednesday—how about coming for dinner Wednesday? Please say you will, Susan! I'll send for you—or better still, if Bitsey's treatment time could be changed, or if she's spending the days here by that time, you could drive out with her. And of course I'd see that you got home."

Susan felt trapped. She couldn't stand there, trying to think up another excuse, still dripping all over the place . . . Also, she didn't like to refuse when it was Bitsey's birthday.

"Well . . . I guess I could come Wednesday."

"That's fine. Bitsey will be so pleased. Suppose we keep it a surprise. Wednesday then, and I'll look forward to seeing you, Susan." His blue eyes smiled his thanks.

Well, she had let herself in for it, Susan thought as she shed her wet suit and got into a fresh white uniform.

"In for what? she asked herself.

Mr. Crawford was probably only trying to be nice for Bitsey's sake.

Susan talked to Miss Armstrong about Bitsey that very afternoon. She explained why she thought the child should be admitted to the preschool if there was a place for her.

"I believe we can make one," Miss Armstrong said thoughtfully. "Of course our classroom is pretty full. But there's hardly a day that one or two of the children cannot come because of colds or some other up-

set. We should be able to take one more—especially a poor little rich girl like Bitsey Crawford."

"That's what I call her—to myself, of course." Susan was surprised that the Director, who had not seen Bitsey very often, should have given her the same label. "She's deprived of a mother's love and care. And her father is too busy making more money to realize that the things he can buy for Bitsey are not the things a little girl wants and needs."

"Maybe he'll change. Maybe he's started changing already." Miss Armstrong's dark eyes sparkled. "Didn't you say he brought Bitsey today?"

Susan said that he had. However, she didn't think Mr. Crawford had changed that rapidly. She had a sneaky feeling that there had been another reason for his showing up at the clinic. Curiosity, perhaps. To see if the clinic was all Susan had said it was.

"I'll speak with Miss Spencer," Miss Armstrong was saying; Miss Spencer was the schoolteacher. "But I think it will be safe for you to let Bitsey's father know that she can start the first of the week. You can get in touch with him, can't you, Susan?"

Susan would have preferred that Miss Armstrong take care of this part of it. But there was no good reason why she couldn't call Mr. Crawford. Or he might even come to the clinic again.

The only thing was that he would give Susan all the credit for getting Bitsey admitted to the school; he would think he had to do something more for her, as he kept saying. Susan would rather not have him feel obligated. She didn't want the man to do anything for her.

"Nothing can make up for a mother's love and care," the Director was saying, her black eyes filled with sympathy. "Especially when a child is handicapped. It's too bad the mother is dead. Maybe Mr.

Crawford will marry again—if only for Bitsey's sake."

There must be plenty of women who would be willing to marry a man as good looking as Mr. Crawford, Susan realized.

"Mr. Crawford seems sort of bitter about his wife. He asked me if Bitsey ever spoke of her mother, and he seemed relieved when I said she never had."

"That's rather strange," Miss Armstrong commented, looking thoughtful again. "It doesn't seem fair, either to the child or the mother, to let Bitsey forget her."

This was exactly what Susan thought. Perhaps it was even what was wrong with Bitsey. Susan wished she could tell the little girl's father that she felt it was wrong. However, it was much too personal a matter.

"I'm glad you told me about Bitsey," the Director said before Susan left her office. "As you know, we don't often pry into family affairs. But there are exceptions to every rule. And rehabilitating anyone goes beyond such prescribed treatment as massage and heat and exercise—or even teaching him to walk again. It must give the person his rightful place in life, restore his faith in himself and in others."

That was why, Susan thought, Miss Armstrong had made such a success of her work; she saw beyond the physical process of restoring efficiency to the body; she saw the spiritual need, too.

"I know you will do all you can for Bitsey—our poor little rich girl." The Director smiled at Susan.

The Director had placed more responsibility on Susan—responsibility that went far beyond her duties as a Physical Therapist.

"I wanted to speak to you about someone else," Susan said before she left the Director's office. "I have

a friend who really ought to be getting treatments. He had a bad accident in which he suffered a double fracture. He still walks with a limp and has a great deal of pain at times. I think we could help him."

"I'm sure we could," Miss Armstrong agreed promptly. "But of course, as you know, every patient must be sent here on a doctor's recommendation."

"Ray's doctor wants him to continue treatment," Susan said. "But Ray feels he can't spare the time, or the money. He could come in during his lunch hour and again on Saturdays. And I thought perhaps some arrangement could be made—say, on a weekly basis—so that the expense wouldn't be too much."

"Your friend needn't pay anything, if that's what's keeping him from having treatments," the Director said.

"Oh, I'm sure he would rather pay something!" Susan knew that Ray wouldn't accept what he considered "charity." She also knew that Miss Armstrong had said this because she thought Ray was a special friend of Susan's. "And I'm not certain that his aunt can persuade Ray to take the treatments. I just thought I would speak to you about it first."

"Why don't you try your powers of persuasion?" The black eyes sparkled. "I don't believe any young man would refuse to listen to you, Susan -especially a very special friend of yours."

Susan felt her color rising. "He isn't exactly 'special.' " Tom Wilcox, when Susan had told him about Ray, had jumped to the same conclusion—that Ray was Susan's "steady."

"Well, get him to come in," the Director said, "and we'll do all we can for him. Am I right in assuming that you would prefer that I assign some other therapist to him?"

"Oh, by all means!"

For a woman who had never married, Miss Armstrong was most understanding. Ray might not be a special friend, but she knew him too well to give him treatments.

Now all that remained was to persuade Ray to come to the clinic.

Chapter 9

Susan decided to send Mr. Crawford a note, telling him that Bitsey could come to the preschool the following week. She dictated the short letter to the secretary; it would be on clinic stationery, so, except for her signature, it would be impersonal.

Susan didn't exactly know why she wanted it this way—maybe it was silly. Anyone would think she was afraid of things developing into too personal a relationship, not only between herself and Bitsey, but the child's father.

She wished she hadn't promised to go for dinner Wednesday, even though it was Bitsey's birthday. But there was no way of getting out of that now. Instead of keeping it a surprise, as he had said, Bitsey's father had told her that Susan was coming, and the little girl could talk of nothing else.

Unfortunately Susan made another error; she mentioned that her own birthday was the same month—on the following week-end, in fact. "So we were born under the same star," she told the little girl, and Bitsey was delighted with this.

"Then we'll have two birthday parties at one time!"

she cried. "Anna will have to make an extra big cake, Susan, with lots of candles!"

"Oh, no!" Susan exclaimed, realizing her mistake too late. She certainly didn't want Mr. Crawford to know she was having a birthday. "Please don't tell anyone, Bitsey. You see, when you grow up, you stop having birthdays; especially if you're a girl. Girls don't want people to know they are getting older. After they reach twenty-one, they stay there—for awhile, anyway."

"But you look younger than that," Bitsey said promptly. "You don't look twenty-one . . ."

"Twenty-two!" Susan corrected laughingly.

"My daddy says you look like a kid," Bitsey said solemnly. "He said he was surprised when he found how young you are, Susan. He said I should have told him. Just as I should have told him how awfully pretty you are, instead of how nice you are."

"Why, thank you, Bitsey." Susan felt her color deepen. "But remember—not a word about my birthday when I come to your party."

Bitsey said all right, she would remember.

When Susan got home around one o'clock Saturday, she found her mother in a great state of excitement, not a difficult matter for Mrs. Randall when things seemed to be turning out as she wanted them to.

"Susan, why didn't you tell me that you had met Bitsey's father! Remember, I told you it wouldn't hurt to cultivate people like the Crawfords."

Susan didn't gather just what her mother was talking about until she went on into the living room. On the table in front of the window was a tall vase filled with red roses: long-stemmed, gorgeous ones, some in full bloom, others in bud.

"I hope you don't mind, darling, that I opened the

card," her mother, following at her heels, was saying ecstatically. "Aren't they beautiful! They must have cost a *fortune*, this time of the year! And so many of them! Such a sweet note, Susan."

Mrs. Randall handed her daughter the small white envelope that had come with the flowers.

Susan did mind that it had been opened, but she decided not to say anything.

"A small token of gratitude," the card read, "in appreciation of your acting so promptly after our talk. We are both looking forward to seeing you for dinner on Wednesday."

The red roses were the answer to her "impersonal" note.

"Dinner on Wednesday—how very nice, Susan! You'll get to meet Mrs. Crawford—that is, if she's back by then. You did say she was away, didn't you? And no doubt there will be other guests. Maybe you will meet someone interesting at last!"

Susan, not without a sense of guilt, let the remark about Bitsey's mother pass. This was no time to say that the little girl's mother was dead. Her mother would let her ideas grow and grow . . .

"I doubt that there will be anyone else there besides the family. It's a birthday dinner for Bitsey. Bitsey's real name is Elizabeth. But that's too long, I guess, for such a little girl. Bitsey says, in trying to pronounce it, she gave herself her nickname."

"You never can tell." Mrs. Randall refused to be daunted. Susan was bound to meet some interesting people—meaning some nice young man with excellent prospects—at the Crawfords'. This dinner party would be the beginning—Susan's mother felt it in her bones.

Every married woman was a matchmaker. When Mrs. Crawford met Susan, and saw what a lovely girl

she was, she would immediately have some fine young man in mind for her.

Mrs. Randall was ready to discard the handsome young doctor and substitute anyone else these wonderful people, the Crawfords, might supply in his place. For, of course, living as they did—a big estate, a chauffeur-driven car—they would only know the very best people.

Susan pondered as to whether or not she should acknowledge the roses. She finally decided that it would be all right to wait and thank Mr. Crawford for them when she saw him. Wednesday was only a few days away.

But Sunday came before Wednesday. And if Susan looked forward to Wednesday with some misgivings, she had been looking forward to Sunday eagerly.

Her reason went beyond hoping to renew her friendship with Ray and establish it on its old footing: she was anxious to learn whether or not his aunt had been able to persuade Ray to come to the clinic. If not, Susan would just have to add her powers of persuasion, as Miss Armstrong had suggested. Both the Director and Ray's aunt seemed to agree that Susan was the best choice to influence that young man.

Susan had a new dress which she had picked up at a sale when shopping with Evelyn Thatcher last Saturday afternoon. It was such a dream of a dress that Susan hadn't been able to resist it. The full skirt was accordion pleated and there was a short jacket that went with it for less formal wear. It was a dress she could never have afforded if it hadn't been marked down a lot.

When Susan came downstairs, her mother couldn't understand why she was wearing her lovely new dress to a neighbor's house.

"I should think you'd save it for Wednesday evening, darling. You'll want to look especially nice at the Crawfords' dinner party."

Susan refrained from reminding her mother that that was to be a little girl's birthday party, not a formal dinner party. Maybe the new dress was a bit "dressy" for this evening, too, but Susan wanted to wear it.

She was rewarded by the look in Ray's eyes when he saw her. He gave a low whistle. "My, don't we look real cool tonight! Or, to be more poetic, like a dream walking."

"Do you like it?" Susan whirled around, to show off the full skirt.

"I wasn't talking just about the dress." Ray smiled that crooked little smile.

He acted, all through the evening, as though nothing had ever come between them. But when it was time to leave and Susan had a moment alone with his aunt, Mrs. Farrell told her that she had not made much headway with Ray.

"He insists he can't spare the time to take any more treatments," she told the young nurse. "Why don't you talk to him, Susan, on your way home? Maybe you can do something with that boy!"

Ray had said he would drive Susan home. It was close enough that they could have walked, but he declared she was much too fine a young lady this evening to walk even a few blocks.

"Not that my beat-up Chevy is elegant enough," he added, as he opened the door for her to get in. "I hope you're not afraid to ride in this old piece of junk, Susan."

"It always got us wherever we wanted to go -and back," she said, smiling. "It's such a beautiful night,

Ray, and it's early—how about driving up to the ridge where we can get a good look at all those stars?"

Ray seemed to hesitate a moment. Then he said, "Okay by me."

They drove in silence, a nice companionable silence, with the soft night air in their faces. When they reached a high spot that overlooked a valley, Ray pulled up and stopped.

Susan, hating the task before her, decided to take the plunge at once.

"Ray . . . I've been wanting to talk to you. I want you to do something for me," she said.

"There isn't much I wouldn't do for you, Susan." His voice held a new quality, a sort of huskiness, and the one-sided smile played on his nice mouth.

"No one would think so—the way you've been staying away."

"Didn't it ever occur to you that I might have my reasons?"

"I can't see what they could be."

"Then I'll show you . . ." He reached out and drew her into his arms. His mouth against hers was not demanding or rough. . . .

Perhaps she should have pulled away. Yet it was a refuge, being in Ray's arms, almost as though she belonged there.

"Now you know my reasons." Reluctantly he let her go, though one arm still encircled her waist. "I shouldn't have done that, Susan. But you must know I've been wanting to—ever since I first saw you walking down our street, your hair shining like gold in the sunlight, your uplifted face so utterly appealing. Knowing I had to get to know you, tell you how I felt . . . and now, having no right to do so . . . You're not angry with me, are you, Susan?"

How could a person be angry because someone

loved you? Whether you could accept such a gift or not.

"No, I'm not angry," Susan said gently.

There was another moment of silence between them. Ray broke it. "You said there was something you wanted me to do for you. I guess you know there's not much I wouldn't do—if I can."

He was going to pass over that moment when he had taken her in his arms and kissed her, let her know how he felt toward her. Well, maybe that was best.

"There *is* something, Ray. I want you to come to the clinic and take treatments. Before you say you can't, I've already spoken to our Director and it can be arranged. You need pay only what you feel you can—say, five dollars a week. And the treatments can be during your lunch hour and on Saturday—I know you have a half day then. Please say you will, Ray!"

"How can I refuse you, Susan, when you ask me that way? And when you say you aren't angry with me. But I want you to know that what happened tonight—well, it won't happen again, I promise you."

Susan was so glad that he had promised to come to the clinic that, impulsively, she did something that might have been considered rather bold. She leaned over and gave him a kiss. It landed somewhere between his nose and mouth and it was only a spontaneous, friendly gesture. Yet it left her a bit breathless.

She drew out of his embrace and quickly sought safer territory. "Then I'll expect you at the clinic the first of the week. And one other thing, Ray—please let's be friends. Just as we were before anything happened."

"That's all right with me." His voice was a bit husky again. Perhaps because he took what she had just said to mean that friendship was all there could ever be between them.

Chapter 10

Bitsey had told Susan that her daddy was sending Charles for her on Wednesday. He supposed Susan would want to go home and rest awhile, rather than driving home with Bitsey; the chauffeur would call for her at six-thirty.

And that same day, Ray, coming to the clinic for his first treatment, asked Susan for a date that evening.

He suggested that they go to a movie, mentioning one that had opened at a neighborhood theater which she might enjoy.

And Susan, who wanted to go with him, had to tell him that she had a previous engagement. Since she was afraid he would take her refusal to mean that she didn't want to have a date with him, she added that she would be delighted to go any other evening, mentioning Friday night as a possibility. And Ray quickly took her up on this.

Miss Armstrong had assigned Evelyn Thatcher as Ray's therapist. Susan was pleased; Evelyn was an ex

perienced PT, and Ray couldn't have been placed in better hands.

At lunch the following day, which was served for the staff members in a private dining room, Susan asked Evelyn if she thought she could help Ray and how often he would be taking treatments.

"Three a week to start," the other nurse replied. Evelyn was quite a few years older than Susan, but the two had become friends. She was a tall, dark girl with quiet manners; she supported an invalid mother, which, she claimed, was why she hadn't married. "Yes, I'm almost certain I can help him. He deserves it, too. He certainly thinks a lot of you, Susan."

Susan blushed. "What makes you say that?"

"He couldn't talk about much else—how you met, what a wonderful girl you are."

"I think Ray's pretty wonderful, too. He seems to feel his accident has changed his life, but I don't see why it should. Although," she smiled, "it did change mine. It was because of Ray that I decided to become a PT."

"The man behind the woman, eh?" Evelyn smiled. "Well, maybe if Ray knew a woman was behind *him*, he might not feel so unfortunate. I agree with you, Susan, that it's not what a man does, but what he is."

Evelyn would be good for Ray, Susan decided. She would help give him back his old self-confidence.

Mrs. Randall was in a dither because the Crawfords were sending the big black Cadillac for Susan. But she was disappointed when she saw that Susan was wearing an old dress instead of the expensive new one. Susan had always favored this particular dress. It was a soft shade of amber with a dark brown velvet belt, and she wore a string of gold beads and gold earrings.

"Of course that color does go well with your hair,"

her mother conceded. "If only you'd let your hair grow long again, Susan! And put some curl in it, instead of wearing it straight."

Susan said her short hair was so comfortable that she doubted if she would ever let it grow long again.

Her mother tried to persuade her to borrow her mink stole. It would go nicely with Susan's tailored cloth coat. But her daughter refused this generous offer. Spring was in the air tonight; the stole would look as though she were trying to appear glamorous. Besides, that stole was one of her mother's most cherished possessions, a last gift from her husband, and if anything happened to it, Mrs. Randall would never survive.

"Susie looks all right as she is," Gramps said, as usual taking her side. "A rose doesn't need any adornment, and Susie looks like a rose tonight. Any man would think she does."

Mrs. Randall just prayed that some man at the Crawfords' dinner party would agree with him. She still had a feeling, amounting almost to a premonition, that this evening at the Crawfords' would somehow be a beginning of good things to come for Susan.

There was no man there when Susan arrived at the big white house. Not even Mr. Crawford. Bitsey, who had been waiting in the enormous hall, greeted her with cries of delight and a big hug. She was dressed in a beautiful white party dress with a wide pink sash and a matching ribbon in her curls. A picture book birthday little girl, Susan thought, returning the warm embrace.

"Wait till you see my birthday present from Daddy!" she exclaimed, taking Susan's hands as soon as Anna had relieved Susan of her coat. "Daddy phoned that he'd be late. That's what always hap-

pens when he's promised to be on time! But I guess he couldn't help it, even if it is my birthday."

"I'm sure he couldn't," Susan said. Yet she felt that Bitsey's father should have made a special effort not to be late this evening. As she had expected, apparently she was the only guest. She was glad she hadn't worn her more formal new dress.

The birthday present that Bitsey was so excited about was a self-service elevator behind the curving stairway. Bitsey said it had been a complete surprise. She had heard hammering and noticed workmen around, but she hadn't seen the elevator until time to come downstairs to greet Susan.

"Daddy thinks I'm getting too big to be carried up and down stairs," the little girl explained, as she showed Susan how she could push a button and go up and down as she wished. "Isn't it fun, Susan?"

Susan agreed that it was. She must admit that Bitsey's father could be very thoughtful. Also, it must have been a wrench to him to have to realize that his daughter might never be able to manage the stairs alone.

They had to ride up and down several times before Anna announced that dinner was ready. She explained that Mr. Crawford, when he phoned, had said that if he was not home by seven, they should dine without him.

Bitsey couldn't hide her disappointment, and again Susan thought that her father should have put aside whatever had come up unexpectedly, no matter how important it was.

He had inferred in the note that had come with the red roses that he was looking forward to dining with Susan. Only a polite gesture, Susan thought now. Business, she suspected, would always come first with Mr. Crawford.

At least she assumed that it was business that was keeping him.

Dinner was rather a stiff affair, in spite of Susan's efforts to make it gay. The dining room was so big and the long table, glittering with crystal and silver, could have easily accommodated twenty. Charles served, and although the food was excellent, Susan did not enjoy being waited upon with so much ceremony. No wonder Bitsey liked to eat in her own upstairs rooms.

The table was cleared, except for the enormous centerpiece of pink flowers and the tall silver candelabra, and Charles was bringing in the birthday cake, resplendent with white icing and five pink candles, when Bitsey's father finally arrived.

"Oh, Daddy, you did get here in time!" Bitsey's blue eyes lighted up. "You can watch me make a wish and blow out the candles. I was so afraid you wouldn't get home until my party was over!"

"I'm terribly sorry to be late." He gave his little daughter an affectionate kiss and sent Susan an apologetic smile, before he took his place at the head of the table. "You know I wouldn't miss your party if I could possibly help it, honey. If it had been a man, I would have had him tossed out of my office. But you can't do that to a woman." For a moment, his eyes, so like Bitsey's, held that ice-blue expression.

There must be quite a few women in Mr. Crawford's life, Susan was thinking. Women would naturally flock after such a handsome and rich young widower.

Bitsey blew out the candles and cut the first piece of cake, with Charles's help. Mr. Crawford told Charles to send Anna in—he wanted to compliment her on the cake. Then he told Charles to serve coffee

and a cordial—with a gingerale for Bitsey—in the living room.

"I guess we should let you stay up a little later tonight, Bitsey," His eyes smiled down into his little girl's as they walked, hand in hand, toward the living room. He slowed his long stride to match the child's, restricted by the brace she wore. "Don't you think it would be all right, Susan, to postpone Bitsey's bedtime until nine?"

"I most certainly do," she agreed emphatically.

In the living room a log fire was burning in the huge stone fireplace, above which hung a large mirror. Bitsey sat down on a couch, her father beside her. When Susan started to sit in a chair, the little girl patted the place on her other side and asked Susan please to sit there.

"Well, now, this is cozy . . . Don't we make a nice picture?" Bitsey's father indicated their reflection in the mirror. "Big Papa Bear, Pretty Mama Bear, and little Birthday Bear!"

Bitsey laughed, clapping her hands. "Oh, I wish Susan was my mama! I wish that she could stay with us all the time! That would be the best birthday present of all."

"So it would," her father said, and now his eyes, not ice-blue but warm as a sunny sky, smiled into Susan's. No doubt he was amused by the swift color that flooded her face. "Maybe it will come true. Who knows?"

He shouldn't say that to a child, even in jest, Susan thought. Before Bitsey could say anything that might make matters worse, she put in quickly, "Would you like me to read you a story before time to go to bed, Bitsey?"

Susan's birthday gift to Bitsey had been a storybook filled with colored illustrations.

Bitsey said she would love that. "No one ever reads me a story. Anna says it hurts her eyes and Charles is too hard to understand." Apparently Bitsey had accepted the fact that her father was always too busy to read to a little girl.

"I like to have someone read aloud to me, too." If her father felt any guilt at such neglect, he gave no sign of it. "May I listen, Susan, if I promise to be very quiet?"

He was still teasing, his blue eyes laughing at her. Susan replied coolly, "If it won't bore you, Mr. Crawford."

"No danger of that . . . But don't you think you should stop calling me Mr. Crawford? It makes me feel like an outsider—as though I didn't belong to your select circle." His eyes were laughing at her, as though he knew he had chosen the right time to say this. For now, Bitsey cried, "Oh, yes, you must call Daddy by his name. Since you can't call him daddy, too, Susan."

"The name is Jon, Susan—spelled without the h. But don't let me keep you from beginning the fairy story!"

Susan had no intention of calling Mr. Crawford "Jon." He had managed, as he so consistently could, to make her feel very self-conscious again as she began to read aloud. But since she enjoyed it, often reading at home to Gramps, she soon forgot herself. Perhaps it helped to have two such attentive listeners.

Nothing would do but she read one more story, when the first one was finished. Then it was after nine and Anna came to take Bitsey off to bed.

"Will you come upstairs, too, Susan, with Daddy, to see that I'm tucked in and to kiss me good night?"

Naturally Susan couldn't refuse. However, she decided that as soon as possible she would leave.

Chapter 11

Susan had hoped that Charles would drive her home in the big black Cadillac. But when she saw the low sports car parked under the porte-cochere she knew that Bitsey's father intended to drive.

He hadn't offered any argument when she said she ought to leave. But now, taking his place behind the wheel, after helping her into the low seat, he said, "You don't really have to go straight home, do you, Susan? Can't we take the long way round and stop somewhere for a drink?"

Susan wanted to say that she preferred to go straight home, but she knew if she did, Jon Crawford would think she was afraid of being alone with him. And the funny part of it was, he would think right.

"I don't mind." Susan sat as far to her side in the low seat as she could. It was wide enough to seat three and so low that she felt as though she was almost on the ground.

It was a lovely night, the stars as bright as when she and Ray had taken a drive in his old beat-up Chevy.

As then, the occupants of the custom-made convertible were silent. However, Susan felt that the silence was strained, not companionable as when she had ridden with Ray. But she knew Ray; he was her friend. And this man beside her was a complete puzzle. She did not feel that she knew him at all.

"You don't like me, do you, Susan?" Having reached a highway that had little traffic, Jon Crawford drove more slowly. He turned in the seat to glance down at the profile of the young girl at his side. An exquisite profile, really, piquant and tender, and very appealing.

"Why should I dislike you?"

"That's what I'd like to know." His laugh was rueful. "People don't dislike me as a general rule."

She supposed he meant that no woman ever disliked him.

"Why should you care whether I like you or not, Mr. Crawford?" she parried.

"There's one reason—calling me Mr. Crawford when I begged you to call me Jon."

"I can't imagine you begging anyone to do anything."

"As a rule, I don't. Begging seldom gets a man anywhere, Susan." He was driving even slower now. "Another reason I want you to like me is because of Bitsey. That shouldn't require any explaining. My little girl loves you."

"I am very fond of Bitsey."

"You are wonderful with her. Seeing you together—reading to her, hearing her prayers—made me realize that what you've said is true—I cannot buy happiness for my daughter."

He spoke so seriously now that Susan couldn't help feeling sorry for him.

"You can make Bitsey happy by giving her more

of your time, more of yourself, Jon." Without thinking, and perhaps to soften what she had been wanting to say, Susan used his first name for the first time.

He was silent for so long that she supposed she had hurt him. But she had made him start to thinking, too.

"I suppose you are right," he said. "Someone else used to tell me the same thing."

He must mean his wife -but why didn't he say so? Susan wondered. Evidently he couldn't bring himself to speak her name. He must have loved her very much.

"It takes a lot out of a man to get ahead in this age of competition and complications," he defended himself. "And he doesn't do it for himself, but for those he loves. Women don't seem to realize that."

Susan did; she knew that her own father had probably driven himself to an early death in order to give his family security. Experts claimed that that was why men didn't live as long as women.

"I'm in Wall Street, and the brokerage business is temperamental, to say the least," Jon Crawford was continuing. "Aside from the time spent during business hours, it takes more time and effort, cultivating clients and meeting associates outside the office. You have to drive yourself to keep ahead."

"But when you have enough, why want more? Material things, I mean. I'm sure that Bitsey, for one, would rather have an hour with you than all the swimming pools money could buy."

"I suppose you're right. I've heard much that same theory before, too."

Again Susan wondered if he referred to Bitsey's mother. Did he realize now that he hadn't given her enough of himself? Now that it was too late to make amends. But it wasn't too late for Bitsey.

"Then why not turn over a new leaf?" she suggested. "People can change, if they want to."

"Would *you* like me better if I did?"

That was beside the point. Yet she was honest with him. "I don't know. I don't see that it matters whether I like you or not. It's your own conscience you must live with."

She certainly hadn't intended to get this serious. But he had asked for it.

He swung the car into a driveway where a restaurant's neon sign hung. There were not many cars. Jon parked in the back where it was dark.

He switched off the lights of his car. But instead of getting out, he turned in the low seat and before Susan knew what was happening, she was in his arms, and being kissed.

It was not a light kiss such as Ray had given her. It was a kiss that was demanding and possessive. But when he let her go, he said almost the same thing that Ray had. Only he made it a statement, not a question.

"Don't be angry. I couldn't help doing that. I've been wanting to ever since I first saw you, Susan. And now you know all the reasons why I want you to like me."

She wasn't angry, exactly. She didn't know what she was. Surprised, certainly. Questioning. Wondering what he meant, for she didn't believe that Jon Crawford really thought he was in love with her.

"I want you to marry me."

This abrupt statement came as a shock.

"But you you don't know me," she protested.

"I know enough about you to know you would make any man a good wife."

This was absurd! Asking her to *marry* him when they had only met three times!

"I don't expect you to say you will this soon, Susan." His voice was different now; she could see that his eyes were smiling, and he took her hands in his. This time, his touch was gentle. "But I hope in time you will. Remember I promised Bitsey."

Susan didn't believe that any woman could take the place of a child's own mother. Now, however, she understood what this was all about. Jon Crawford wanted to marry her because of Bitsey. There didn't have to be any other reason; he hadn't even said that he loved her.

"You shouldn't have told her that. I don't believe I could ever marry you. Marriage should be founded on mutual love and respect and loyalty."

"Loyalty and respect, yes. As for love, look at the love matches that fail. Liking should be enough, and a certain amount of attraction. I admit that I am attracted to you, Susan—and I believe you are to me. That's something that doesn't require a lot of time. The same goes for liking a person, I believe either you do or you don't from the beginning."

Susan couldn't go along with his argument. She still thought that love was important. She had to admit that he was not unattractive. But there were a number of things about which they did not think alike.

Anyway, the whole idea was ridiculous.

Or it would be if Jon were not so much in earnest. For there was no doubting that he wanted to marry her.

It's like fiction, Susan thought. The kind of romantic situation her mother was always building up for her.

"But I don't want to marry anyone," Susan stated emphatically.

"That's what you think now—but every girl wants to be married. I hope to change your mind, Susan."

"I think my work is enough. I wouldn't want to give that up." She didn't know why she was telling Jon Crawford this, since she had no intention of letting him change her mind.

"You wouldn't have to give it up entirely. You could always keep up with your work with Bitsey. She will need treatments for a long time. And if you wished, you could give a few hours a week to the clinic. Most women seem to want some outside interest, say a pet charity, or somethong of the sort, after they marry."

The kind of women he knew, society women, often did go in for some charitable work. But there had been an undercurrent of bitterness in his tone. Perhaps he had refused to let his wife have those outside interests, and now regretted it—just as he did not having given her more of his time.

It would be convenient to have a second mother who was also a physical therapist for his little girl. But that wasn't enough to satisfy a woman; every woman wanted to be loved for herself.

"I'd always be good to you, Susan," he was saying. "I would settle a considerable amount of money on you."

It was the businessman speaking now; the man who really believed that money was more important than anything else. No matter how much Jon Crawford might try to change, he would probably always believe that.

If she ever married, Susan felt certain that she would want to continue working—for awhile, anyway. But she was in no hurry to marry anyone.

Jon seemed to know what she was thinking. "I realize it's too soon to expect you to say you will marry

me, Susan. But you could do worse, you know!" he ended lightly.

But no matter how lightly he said it, there was no doubt that Jon Crawford did think a girl like Susan could do no better than to marry a man like himself. And even though it had been rather an unusual one, any proposal of marriage was an honor, Susan decided.

"Shall we go inside now and have that drink?"

Jon got out to hold the door for her. And suddenly, for no good reason, Susan thought of the woman who had detained him in his office and made him late for Bitsey's party. She couldn't help wondering who the woman had been. There must be many women in Jon Crawford's life—women who would like very much to be Mrs. Jon Crawford.

And he had chosen her as the one he wanted to marry—the woman to be a mother to his motherless little daughter.

Chapter 12

From that evening, Jon Crawford besieged Susan with what amounted to a whirlwind courtship. The house was always filled with his flowers. Huge boxes of candy, expensive bottles of perfume, the latest books were delivered by messenger or in person. There would have been more expensive gifts, but Susan had returned the first one—a gold bracelet. Jon had tried to persuade her to keep it, saying that Bitsey had let the cat out of the bag about Susan having a recent birthday, but Susan had refused to accept such an expensive gift on any excuse.

He had also taken her to most of the Broadway hits, and they had dined at several of the best New York restaurants.

Susan would have been a most unusual girl if she had not been impressed—yes, even a little thrilled—by all this attention.

Besides, she had lost her feeling of self-consciousness in Jon's presence and now felt at ease with him.

And if Susan was thrilled and impressed, her mother was nearly beside herself.

She told herself frequently that she had been right when she had thought that that first dinner party would be a beginning. And wasn't it just too marvelous that Mr. Crawford had turned out to be a widower!

Naturally Susan had had to confess that there didn't seem to be any Mrs. Crawford, when the flowers and all the rest of the gifts had started flooding the Randall homestead.

"He must be a perfectly wonderful man!" Susan's mother announced without any reservations, although she had not, at that time, met the gentleman under discussion.

"I wouldn't call him wonderful," Susan had said, endeavoring to curb her mother's eulogy. "Jon is nice, nicer than I thought at first, and in spite of his being so rich, I can't help feeling a little sorry for him."

"Sorry for him—with that beautiful house and two faithful old servants and, without question, more things to do, places to go, than any one person could possibly have time for!" Mrs. Randall couldn't fathom such reasoning on her daughter's part. But in a way, it might be a good thing that Susan felt sorry for him. Pity and love were akin.

Of course Susan had not told her mother that Jon had asked her to marry him. And so soon, when they had only met a few times. Nevertheless, Mrs. Randall was confident that her high hopes would be fulfilled in due course.

The trouble was that Susan had never confided in her mother. So Mrs. Randall had to guess what was going on, and what was in her daughter's mind. But any young girl would be swept off her feet by a man like Jon Crawford. No girl would be able to resist him. And of course, when he finally did pop that all-

important question, no girl in her right senses could possibly refuse him.

The only thing was, as Susan's mother had to acknowledge, that Susan was not the average girl. Her feet were too firmly planted on the ground. Susan had never succumbed to a show of wealth and glamour; she could take her bread without jelly. And she was so set against matrimony.

There was one other thing that troubled Susan's mother and cast a shadow over these bright prospects. That old boy friend of Susan's had come back on the scene. He would stop by the house on his way to that dowdy aunt of his up the street. Sometimes he suggested that Susan go with him, or that they take a walk, and several times they had gone to a neighborhood movie.

Of course there was no comparison between what Ray Farrell had to offer and all that Jon Crawford could do for Susan. Mrs. Randall couldn't see why Susan bothered with Ray at all. His prospects were limited; he had no connections either in the business world or the social one. Susan was simply wasting her time on him.

But Susan was glad that she and Ray were friends again. She had been afraid that there might be some awkwardness between them after he had practically told her that he loved her and shown that he thought it hopeless since he couldn't ask any girl to marry him. But they had resumed the old companionship, enjoying being together, whether it was taking a walk, sitting in a movie, or sharing the family gatherings at Aunt Mary's.

And Ray was much better since he had resumed his treatments. His leg hardly bothered him at all any more and he didn't get nearly so tired. He had used a

cane for awhile, but Evelyn Thatcher agreed with him that he could discard it now.

For a young woman who didn't want to fall in love or be married, Susan was doing quite well.

Of course neither man knew about the other. Or so Susan thought.

Then one evening, when Susan and Ray were returning from a movie, Ray asked her if she was going to marry that "guy" she was "running around with."

"I suppose it's none of my business," he tacked on hastily, before Susan could answer. "But I just had to ask about it."

Susan had a question, too.

"Where did you get the idea that I was running around with anyone—or thinking about marrying?"

"A little bird told me."

Susan tried to think which bird that would be. Her mother, perhaps, hoping to discourage Ray from dropping by. Gramps wouldn't be guilty, unless he had unwittingly said something that had led Ray to think Susan was dating someone steadily.

"You know I've told you that I'm in no hurry to marry anyone."

"This guy might have different ideas. From what I gather, he can afford to marry. And that's another reason I brought up the subject, Susan. I wouldn't want to stand in the way of a good thing."

"When you are, suppose I let you know?"

"That's fair enough, I guess." There was a note of relief in his tone. "Is it a promise?"

"Of course it is, Ray."

"Thanks—that makes me feel some better. Gives me a little more time, anyway."

Susan didn't want to marry Ray, any more than she wanted to marry Jon Crawford. But she didn't want to lose Ray's friendship.

Come to think of it, she didn't want to lose Jon's, either.

"I'll be through with night school the end of this month. Then I think maybe I can scrape up enough nerve to go to the boss and ask if there's a chance for a better opening. If not, I may strike out somewhere else. I can't go on being a sort of glorified office boy the rest of my life."

"You won't." Susan still believed in Ray's ability. He just had to be given a chance to prove himself.

This gave Susan an idea that had never occurred to her before and that wouldn't have occurred to her now if she hadn't been so anxious to help Ray regain his confidence in himself.

Why couldn't she speak to Jon Crawford about Ray? Jon had all sorts of connections and should be able to help Ray find a good position.

"I wish I believed in myself as much as you say you do." They had almost reached Susan's house. Ray slackened his step, as though he wanted to prolong their walk as much as possible.

"Of course I believe in you, Ray. So do a lot of other people."

Ray stopped, took her hands and drew her into the shadow of one of the big trees. For a moment she was sure he was going to kiss her.

"As long as you believe in me, that's enough for me. But I've got to prove to you that you're right, Susan. Then—well, maybe then things can be different . . ."

"Susan? Is that you, Susan?" Her mother's voice came from the front porch, her figure outlined in the light shining from inside the house.

"Yes . . ." Why had her mother broken up that moment? Had she wanted Ray to kiss her? Susan wondered. If so, it was too late now to find out.

Ray dropped her hand and they walked on toward the porch.

"I thought you'd *never* get home—surely a movie couldn't last this late!" Her mother had come on outside to meet them. She had barely acknowledged Ray's presence with a brief inclination of her carefully marcelled head. "Jon . . . Mr. Crawford has been phoning. He seemed anxious to talk with you, Susan. It's too bad you weren't here . . ."

"I'm here now, Mother," Susan broke in, not caring if she was rude. Her mother could have waited to deliver this message until after Ray had left.

"I'll trot along," Ray said with his little sidewise grin. "Thanks for letting me take you to the movie, Susan. Sorry I got you home so late. And please don't forget to let me know if anything changes. Be seein' you!" He lifted a hand in a gesture of farewell, turned and walked rapidly away.

Her mother followed Susan into the house.

"What on earth did Ray mean by that last remark, Susan? I do hope you haven't made any foolish promise . . ."

"Really, Mother . . ." Susan began impatiently, then stopped. She waited by the phone, not lifting the receiver until her mother took the hint and went on upstairs.

Chapter 13

Charles, who answered the phone, said he would get Mr. Crawford right away. Charles's voice sounded queer; strained and nervous. Usually it was the controlled one of the perfect servant. Something must be wrong. Susan hoped it had nothing to do with Bitsey.

Bitsey had been doing so well; she enjoyed the school and the other children; it had brought her out of that shy shell. And there was no doubt that she was a happier poor little rich girl now, for her beloved Daddy spent much more time with her. True to his promise to Susan, he had been getting home earlier, allotting a part of each week-end to planning some sort of outing with his small daughter. On several occasions, Susan had shared these excursions: a picnic, a drive up the Hudson, the circus at Madison Square Garden. The three of them always had a wonderful time together.

When Jon came to the phone his voice was tense, too. And it was about Bitsey.

"I'm so glad you called, Susan. Bitsey's ill. She's running a high temperature and aches all over. Our

own doctor is out of town and I tried to reach another one here in the village, but he was out on call. And I don't want to call in just anyone. I thought you might know a reliable doctor who would come at this hour. And, to be honest, I knew I'd feel better, just talking with you. Bitsey has been wishing you were here."

"I'll come over right away." It was around eleven, and she could make it in half an hour. Not that there would be much that Susan could do except let the little girl know that she was standing by. Children were inclined to be terrified when illness struck. Especially at night. "Suppose you try Dr. Adams," she suggested. "Stanley Adams. He doesn't live too far away and I'm sure he'd come; he knows Bitsey from seeing her at the clinic."

"That's fine." Jon's voice showed his relief. "I'll call him at once. It's good of you to offer to come over, Susan. I'll come get you, or send Charles . . ."

"It will be quicker if I start at once," Susan interrupted. "I want to come, Jon. Please tell Bitsey I'll be there very soon. And if, for any reason, you can't reach Dr. Adams, call Dr. Forrest. He's associated with the clinic also."

Susan's mother agreed that Susan ought to go, but she didn't like her driving alone late at night. "I'd go with you, darling, but I just got in before you did and I've a frightful headache from playing bridge all evening . . ."

"I'll ride along," Gramps broke in. "I'll sit in the car, Susan, and wait for you—and probably take a nap so you won't feel you have to be in any hurry."

Susan would like having Gramps. He probably knew she preferred his company to her mother's. Certainly her mother would never have waited outside.

When they reached the big white house it was

ablaze with lights. There was no car in the driveway, and Susan decided the doctor hadn't arrived yet.

Anna let Susan in and told her that Mr. Crawford was upstairs with Bitsey. "The poor man is almost crazy," she added, as the elevator took them to the second floor. "Not that anyone can blame him; Bitsey's all he has now. We're all relieved, Miss Randall, that you would come. I don't know much about sickness, myself."

One look at Bitsey was enough to convince the nurse that the child was very ill. Her lips were blue, and when Susan took her small hand it not only was damp and hot, but there was no coloring beneath the nails.

"I'm so glad you came, Susan," Bitsey said. "I thought you were here in the room awhile ago, but then your face changed and you were Mama, come home again . . ."

"You know this is Susan," her father broke in, his voice harsh, his handsome face drawn with anxiety. "No one else was here. And now that Susan's here, you're going to be all right, honey."

"Of course you are!" Susan had to force a cheerful tone. With a nod of her head, she indicated that she wanted Jon to step away so that the little girl couldn't hear them talking.

"Bitsey should be in a hospital," she told him. "She needs oxygen, Jon. And the fact that she confused me with someone else is another bad sign. When you phone for an ambulance, tell them to come as quickly as possible and to have an oxygen tank for immediate use."

Jon Crawford's face turned white. "Is it as bad as that? You don't think she should wait until Dr. Adams gets here? He should be on his way."

"I don't think we should wait for anything." Even

a half-hour's delay could spell disaster. Susan didn't know much about medical ethics, but she knew there were times when a nurse had to act without waiting for a doctor's verdict.

"Then I'll get an ambulance immediately," Jon said. "I won't phone; I'll go myself." But before he turned to leave, he grasped Susan's hand. "You don't think she's going to die, Susan?"

Susan shook her head. She couldn't trust herself to speak for a moment. "Not if we hurry . . ."

Jon ran down the long flight of curving stairs, and Susan went back to the child. She hated to have to tell Bitsey, who had seen too much of hospitals in her young life, that she must be taken to another hospital.

"Look, darling," her hand brushed back the golden curls from the hot little forehead, "we're going for a short ride . . ."

"I don't want to go—not back to the hospital!" Bitsey wasn't fooled.

"A hospital is the best place to be sometimes, honey. You see, you're having some trouble getting a good long breath, and as soon as you get there, they will be able to do things to help you feel, oh, so much better. And I'll go with you, Bitsey."

"You will?" The wide blue eyes searched Susan's face. Tears filled them and rolled down the round cheeks. "All right, Mama—if you go with me, I'll go . . ."

Susan gave Bitsey a light kiss on the forehead and turned to ask Anna to pack a few things in a bag.

Then she remembered Gramps, waiting in the car—well, Charles could drive him home. Or follow her to the hospital. Gramps wouldn't mind waiting outside there for awhile, either.

Susan heard the ambulance pull into the driveway.

Within a few minutes, Bitsey was bundled onto the stretcher and taken downstairs. Susan ordered oxygen to be started immediately.

Just then, another car swept into the drive, and Dr. Adams jumped out and hurried toward the ambulance.

"I thought it best not to wait for you, Doctor," Susan said. "I hope I did the right thing."

"You most certainly did." The doctor had only to take one look at the child to see that oxygen was needed, although Bitsey's color was better now just from the small amount of oxygen she had received. "We'll put her in a tent as soon as we reach the hospital. I'll go on ahead and give instructions to have one ready."

The ambulance lost no time in getting started. Susan rode in it, sitting beside Bitsey and helping the attendant with the administration of the oxygen. Jon Crawford followed in his car. And Charles had offered to drive Susan's grandfather home, after which he would bring her car back to the hospital.

"You won't leave me again, will you, Mama?" Bitsey's wide blue eyes looked appealingly into Susan's as she again was carried on the stretcher into the hospital.

As before, Susan did not correct her. It was better to let Bitsey think she was her mother for the time being. But she had noticed how white Jon's face went when Bitsey called her "Mama."

"I won't leave you," Susan promised.

She knew that the little girl would probably be afraid at first in the oxygen tent. Sometimes even adults were frightened, often trying to fight their way out. But as soon as they got used to being in the enclosure, the fresh clear air was so wonderful their fear left them.

Bitsey clung to Susan's hand for awhile, then gradually her fingers relaxed, and after she had inhaled with long, deep breaths she fell asleep.

"You're tired." Jon laid a hand gently on Susan's shoulder. "You don't have to stay any longer, Susan. I had a talk with Dr. Adams. He thinks Bitsey will be all right in a few days. But he told me that if she had gone even a short while longer without oxygen, we might have lost our little girl."

"Our little girl," he had said—and Susan's heart was so full of love for the child that she almost seemed like her own. Her response was what any mother's would have been.

"I can't leave, Jon. I promised Bitsey I'd stay. I must be here when she wakes up."

He didn't answer; instead, he leaned down and kissed the top of Susan's head.

"*You* should go home and get some sleep." Susan thought his face still showed signs of the strain he had been through. "I'll phone you when Bitsey wakes, Jon. And don't worry about me; I can doze off in this chair."

"No . . . I'll have a cot set up in the room," Jon said. "And Dr. Adams is getting a special nurse to come on duty at seven in the morning. After Bitsey gets used to her, you can explain that you can't be here all the time. Which reminds me, Susan—don't you want me to phone the clinic around nine and tell them you won't be in tomorrow?"

Susan had actually forgotten about the clinic! She would have remembered when morning came, of course, but it was thoughtful of Jon to offer to call. Susan's patients would have to be divided among the other therapists. Bitsey came before anyone else.

And she came first for the next few days. Susan didn't leave the hospital. At night, she slept on the

cot beside Bitsey. During the day, she sat with Bitsey, telling her stories or reading to her. Bitsey wanted Susan to help with her trays, give her her sponge bath, do most of the necessary nursing duties. The child hadn't got used to the other nurse, so after the first day Dr. Adams said it wasn't advisable to keep her on the case.

"Since Miss Randall wishes to be with Bitsey, anyway, I see no reason why she can't take charge," he told Bitsey's father. "Seeing them together, you would think they were mother and daughter. They even look alike, with the same color hair and eyes."

Jon's blue eyes, which Susan thought so much like Bitsey's, smiled into the doctor's. "I'm glad you said that, Dr. Adams. I've been trying to persuade Miss Randall to marry me. That's what Bitsey wants, too. So perhaps among the three of us, we can talk her into it."

There was something in his eyes, when he looked at Susan, that she hadn't seen there before. A look of such tenderness that it could only mean that Jon wanted her to marry him now for other reasons than just to be a mother to Bitsey. Jon Crawford, as hard as it was to believe, was in love with her!

There was no denying that Bitsey's illness had brought them very close. Susan had discovered a different Jon Crawford from the one she had known before. During those anxious days, all his thoughts had been centered on his little daughter. He had only gone to his office a few hours a day, and not at all until Bitsey was out of danger.

When he asked her again to marry him, could she be certain that she would refuse him? Susan wondered. Did she care enough for Jon Crawford to become his second wife?

Chapter 14

When Susan returned to her work at the clinic, she was gratified to find that she had been missed. All her patients greeted her warmly, declaring they were happy to have her back and saying they had been worried about her. The staff members were every bit as welcoming, even Miss Armstrong remarking that it was good to have Susan back with them.

"Some of us," Evelyn Thatcher confessed, when the two nurses found a few minutes between treatments to chat, "were afraid you might not come back at all, Susan."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Hmm. I think you know what I mean." Evelyn smiled. "When a gal is thrown so dramatically into the arms of a rich young man, with a little child to lead them toward the altar—well, what can you expect? Wedding bells, of course." Her friend's dark eyes were teasing, yet there was a shade of anxiety in them.

Evelyn had become very much attached to the young therapist: she would hate to see her make a

mistake. Incidentally, Evelyn also had become attached to a young man patient of hers, a patient who, without doubt, was much more than attached to Susan.

"I don't know." Susan decided to be honest with Evelyn. "I just can't make up my mind."

"Then that part of the fairy tale is true—the handsome prince has asked you to marry him and the little princess has tried to wheedle you into making the castle your permanent place of residence. Right, Susan?"

"Yes, I guess you are." It did seem like a fairy tale; somehow none of it seemed at all real—Jon asking her to marry him, Bitsey's sudden illness, Jon's last proposal when he had said that surely Susan must see now how much they both needed her—he and Bitsey. And Bitsey, on leaving the hospital, crying and clinging to Susan and begging her to go home with her to live.

It had been difficult to remain unmoved, difficult to refuse Bitsey's pleas because Susan loved the child so much, and because she knew now that Jon wanted her for herself, too.

Yet Susan had insisted that she must have more time, promising both Bitsey and her father that she would try her best to give them the answer they wanted to hear.

She hadn't intended to commit herself so far and had regretted it later. But the words had been spoken and it was too late to recall them.

"Forgive me, Susan, for speaking so plainly," Evelyn said. "I know how much you care for Bitsey, how much you want to make her happy, but you shouldn't sacrifice your own happiness for a child's. I know, too, that her father is the kind of man not

many girls could refuse, but you must remember that love is the most important thing in the whole world."

"How can you be so sure?" Susan asked.

"I suppose you ask that because I'm such an old maid!" Evelyn laughed. "But anyone would tell you that—anyone who has ever known love."

Evelyn had spoken lightly, but her dark eyes looked sad. She might have had to sacrifice her love for some man because of her invalid mother.

"I doubt if I ever fall madly in love with anyone," Susan said. "But I won't forget your advice, Evelyn."

"Don't forget, either," her friend made one last effort, although she could be wrong, of course, in thinking it would be a mistake for Susan to marry Bitsey's father, "that there is someone who loves you very much."

The color deepened in Susan's pretty face. There was no use in saying that she didn't know whom Evelyn meant. But if Ray loved her, he had made it very plain that he couldn't ask her to marry him for a long time—maybe never. And during the time she had spent with Bitsey in the hospital, Susan hadn't heard a word from him.

Perhaps Ray had decided to step aside, leaving a clear field for the other man—a man who had so much more to offer. But if Ray truly loved her, he should give her a chance to choose between them.

Susan hadn't forgotten her decision to speak to Jon about getting Ray a better position. She had only postponed doing this because of Bitsey's illness. There was no reason to put it off any longer. She still felt indebted to Ray for having been the cause of her becoming a Physical Therapist. And since Jon kept insisting that he owed her such a great debt, she really shouldn't hesitate to ask this favor of him.

When Susan did get around to it, she didn't say that Ray Farrell was a special friend of hers; she only told Jon that he was a patient at the clinic.

"I'll be glad to do all I can," Jon assured her. "You know that, Susan. I'm delighted that there's something I can do for you. And the young man sounds as though he deserves help."

This conversation took place one evening when Susan had had dinner with Bitsey and her father and, with Bitsey tucked into bed, Jon was driving Susan home.

"Thank you so much, Jon." Susan no longer sat as far from him as possible in the wide low seat. Tonight, Jon drove with one hand, the other arm around her shoulders. Seeing them, on this early summer moonlight night, anyone would have thought they were sweethearts.

"You're welcome, my sweet. But this chap isn't anyone you're interested in personally, is he?"

"He's a friend, yes."

"Is he in love with you?"

"Why do you ask that?"

"Because I can't imagine any man getting to know you, Susan, and not falling in love with you."

Susan couldn't help thinking that Jon had never said he was in love with her. Of course there was that new look in his eyes, a look of such deep gratitude and warmth that it could be love. On the other hand, Susan sometimes felt that because he must have loved his wife so very much, Jon might never fall in love again. He always said that love was not necessarily the foundation for a good marriage.

"You flatter me, sir." There was no reason to admit that Ray was in love with her. Certainly he had shown no signs of it lately.

"Then he is in love with you." Evidently Jon had

had enough experience with feminine evasion to see through it. "Well, even so, I'll be glad to do whatever I can for him. Tell him to come to my office and I'll try to get something lined up for him."

Susan thanked him again. But she realized that she had put herself under obligation to Jon—something she had never wanted to do.

And Jon was not slow in taking advantage of Susan's feeling of obligation.

When it came time to say good night, he said, "When are you going to say you'll marry me, Susan? You know you're going to have to say you will someday. I shall keep on asking you until you do. And Bitsey keeps asking me when you are coming to stay with us, be with us all the time."

Whenever Susan said goodbye to the little girl, she clung to her as though she couldn't bear to let her leave, as she had again tonight after Susan had read her a bedtime story and heard her prayers. Perhaps if Bitsey hadn't been a handicapped child, Susan wouldn't have been so deeply affected. Then, too, Bitsey had been almost Susan's first patient; this tie had strengthened her feeling toward the little girl, as had their almost daily association since then. Add to this the fact that Bitsey was such a picture of a little girl, and a poor little rich girl, needing all the care and love and understanding that only a woman could give.

"I . . . I don't know . . . If I marry you, Jon, I would want to finish my year at the clinic."

Her work meant so much to her, too. It no longer took too much out of her physically; when she was tired now, it was a good tiredness. There was so much that made up for the few discouragements. For example, there was Tommy Wilcox, who would play football again; old Mrs. Harriman, who no longer

needed treatment; children, like Bitsey, who would have straight backs and walk again, thanks to Susan's skilled hands. It was good to feel that you had had some part in restoring people to their rightful place in life.

"That won't be so long," Jon said. "The summer will pass quickly now that I know you will marry me when the leaves begin to fall. You must let me tell Bitsey, Susan, so that the summer will pass quickly for her, too."

And Jon took her in his arms and kissed her to seal the bargain.

Chapter 15

When Susan came downstairs the following evening, her mother rushed up to her and threw her arms around her.

"Susan, darling, Jon has just told me the wonderful news that you two are to be married in the fall! I can't tell you how happy this makes your mother!"

Jon stood behind them, his blue eyes laughing—until he saw the expression on Susan's face. It was unquestionably an expression of dismay that she threw him over her mother's carefully waved white head.

"I supposed you had told your mother," he said. "I'm so happy about it myself, I want to shout it from the housetops."

Mrs. Randall was beaming at her prospective son-in-law. "Of course you are, Jon dear. I'll have to put an announcement of your engagement in the papers . . ."

"Not yet, Mother." Susan, thought Mrs. Randall, sounded just like her father when she spoke up like that, decisively, abruptly. "What I mean is, there's no hurry."

There was plenty of time, in fact. Fall was a long way off. There were a few people Susan had to tell personally before they read about it in the paper. Miss Armstrong, for one; the clinic Director should be told so that she could plan on replacing Susan. Though, as Jon had said, Susan could still give the clinic some of her time; she would offer to fill in now and then.

And then there was Ray.

She had promised Ray that she would tell him if anything like this happened—and she certainly had to tell him herself.

Somewhat to her suprise, especially after the statement he had just made about shouting the news from the housetops, Jon sided with her. "I think Susan's right, Mrs. Randall. It is a bit soon to give out an announcement. I'm pretty well known, you see, and some of my friends and business associates ought to be informed personally. And such an announcement should mention a definite date for the wedding. Which," he added, his eyes smiling into Susan's now, "is up to Susan to name."

"Just as you two dear children think best." Susan's mother was so pleased that she was willing to give in on such minor points. A public announcement could come later. Meanwhile, she could tell only a few very close friends and start making plans for the wedding.

Susan must have read her mother's mind. "It will have to be a very small wedding," she said. She knew how her mother would gloat over a big church wedding. Most girls wanted that, too. But not Susan. The smaller and quieter, the better.

"I agree with Susan," Jon said. "No outsiders. Only the immediate family. Or maybe I can persuade Susan to be married by a justice of the peace, and leave it at that."

It was not surprising for a man to feel that way about a wedding. Especially a man who had been married before. Susan was sure that Jon's first marriage had been a big social affair.

"Well, we'll see." Mrs. Randall beamed on them both; nothing could possibly stop her cup from overflowing. "But you must not run off and marry! We can make it a nice little home wedding, with the families and perhaps a few friends."

"Please, Mother!" Susan's tone was again the one she used when she had to take her mother down a peg or two by letting her know she wouldn't be treated like a child. "There'll be plenty of time to discuss all this later. I'm not being married tomorrow."

Again Mrs. Randall refused to allow Susan to dampen her enthusiasm. Nothing would happen before fall to prevent the wedding. Or would it?

To make quite certain that nothing did, Susan's mother made up her mind to take one precaution. There was no use in taking chances.

It was a coincidence, especially since once her mind was made up Mrs. Randall was not a person to put things off, that Ray stopped by that very evening.

Susan and Jon had left. And Gramps was, as usual after dinner, dozing in his chair.

"I'm sorry, but Susan isn't here." For once, Susan's mother greeted this young man who had come to call on her daughter with a welcoming smile.

"I'm sorry, too," Ray said. "I particularly wanted to see Susan tonight. I wasn't sure she'd be home, but since I was on my way to my aunt's, I thought I'd take a chance and stop by."

"Well, Susan will be sorry to have missed you. I imagine she would have liked particularly to see you tonight. To tell you her big news. Though of course you will be reading about it later in the papers."

"In the papers?" Ray looked perplexed. But not so much because of what Mrs. Randall had said as because Susan's mother's manner toward him was almost cordial.

"The announcement, I mean. Jon is such an important person that it will probably be headline news. The wedding date has not been definitely set, but it will take place early in the fall."

"Are you telling me that Susan is going to marry that Crawford guy?" It was getting clearer, but not clear enough. Susan had given Ray her word that if any such thing ever came about, he would hear it from her. She had also let Ray believe that there was plenty of time for him to do something about it.

"She most certainly is—and Susan is a *very* lucky girl to be marrying such a fine man as Mr. Crawford." Mrs. Randall said this because this uncouth young man had called Jon a "guy." He ought never to bother Susan again, now that he knew she was going to marry someone else.

"I suppose you mean because he's got plenty of dough. Well, I just hope, Mrs. Randall, that your daughter will be happy—and able to live with her own conscience. You can tell her that for me, if you will."

With which parting speech, Ray turned on his heel and walked rapidly away from the house.

"Oh, I'll tell her . . ." Mrs. Randall's voice was lifted high enough to follow his retreating figure.

Upon further reflection, however, Mrs. Randall decided not to deliver that parting message of Ray's. Sometimes it was just as well to let sleeping dogs lie. She decided that there was no good reason for telling Susan that Ray had even been there. Gramps wouldn't tell her, for he was still dozing when Mrs. Randall went back into the house.

She wondered what that young man had meant by his remark about Susan living with her conscience. He probably thought Susan was only marrying Jon for his money and social position.

Well, it didn't matter what he thought. Mrs. Randall's conscience didn't hurt her at all. She had done what she had for Susan's own good, even though Susan didn't like anyone meddling in her affairs. Susan was independent, just like her father. For somehow, although Mrs. Randall had appeared to "rule" over her husband, Susan's father had managed to retain, to the day of his death, a certain independence of spirit.

Mrs. Randall hoped that Jon would be able to manage Susan after they were married. It was a good thing he was older and that he had been married before. Some mothers might not have liked the idea that their daughter was marrying a man who had had another wife. And a child, as well. But the child, in this case, had been a fortunate factor; it was she who had brought about this marriage. And although some people might think it wouldn't be easy to be a good stepmother, or to fill a first wife's place, Mrs. Randall was not one of these.

She only wished that the marriage could take place immediately. Not because she was anxious to get rid of her only daughter—no one knew how much she would miss Susan—but because she could feel then that she had accomplished her main objective in life.

Chapter 16

When Miss Bancroft, the receptionist, sent word that someone was waiting to see her, Susan was just finishing giving a diathermy and massage treatment. The patient was a young woman with multiple sclerosis. She would never get well, but at least, through treatment, the disease wouldn't progress so rapidly and her suffering wouldn't be so intense.

Susan refused to shorten the treatment, no matter who might be waiting to see her. She always gave this particular patient a little longer period than scheduled, staying to chat with her and help her get dressed, rather than turning her over to one of the aides.

This was her last treatment for the day. It was one of the first really hot days of early summer. Susan was warm, as well as tired. Perhaps it was Jon, come to drive her and Bitsey home, as he sometimes did lately. The pool had been installed at the back of the big white house and the three often had an hour's frolic before dinner. Bitsey was coming along beauti-

fully with her swimming lessons. Which reminded Susan, on her way to the reception room, to check to see how soon Bitsey would be ready to leave. The little girl had been taking a nap, but she should be awake by now.

She was just waking up, and she threw her arms around Susan's neck in a bearlike hug. "Are you going home with me today? Are we going to swim in the pool, Susan? Daddy said if it was warm enough we could, and Anna said she would have Charles serve dinner by the pool. You are coming home with me, aren't you, Susan? That's why I took a long nap, like you said I must."

"I'm looking forward to a swim, too. Get dressed now, Bitsey, like a good little girl. I'll be back to zip you up and adjust your brace." She gave the child a kiss before she left her. Whenever she was with Bitsey, Susan had no qualms about the big step she was going to take in the fall.

The only thing that bothered Susan was that Ray had never answered her note. When he hadn't stopped by or phoned, she had written to him. In the note she had told him about her impending marriage; she had also told him that if he would go to see Jon—giving him the address—that there was a position open for him, and to let her know how he made out.

She hadn't heard a word from him. Nor had Ray gone to Jon's office. Once Susan had gone to his aunt's home, but she had been told that Ray had not been there lately. And he had stopped coming to the clinic for treatments.

Naturally Susan was worried. She couldn't imagine what would cause him to act in this way.

"Did you say someone wanted to see me?" Susan addressed Miss Bancroft.

"Yes. The lady is waiting in Miss Armstrong's of-

fice. Miss Armstrong has already left, since she had to stop by the hospital. She said you could use her office, Miss Randall. Miss Armstrong also said for me to tell you that she knew you would do the right thing."

What on earth did the Director mean by that? Susan was thoroughly puzzled. If it was someone who had come to the clinic to see about taking treatments, Miss Armstrong would have interviewed her.

Susan had never seen the visitor before. Expensively dressed in a tailored linen suit and small veiled hat, she was slight and dark, and exceptionally attractive—beautiful, really, with large dark eyes, fair skin, and delicate features.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," Susan said, as she sat down behind the Director's wide mahogany desk.

"That's perfectly all right. I didn't mind waiting. I've waited so long as it is. You don't know me, Miss Randall. Or why I am here. First, may I say that I am going to put myself at your mercy."

"What can I do for you?"

"You can grant me one request." She had removed one of her immaculate white gloves, and Susan could see that she wore a wedding ring, a band of diamonds, and an enormous emerald-cut diamond. She leaned forward, her dark eyes meeting Susan's.

Susan had never seen such anguish in anyone's eyes.

"I'll be happy to do anything I can for you." Already Susan felt a bond of sympathy with this woman, although she didn't know why.

"You are very kind." The visitor managed a faint smile. "I should tell you who I am. I am Mrs. Crawford. Bitsey's mother."

"Bitsey's *mother* . . ." Susan had to grasp the arms of her chair. Bitsey's mother was dead. Or at least she

had been led to believe she was. "I—I thought . . . I didn't know . . ."

"I suppose Bitsey has been told never to speak of me. You probably thought I was dead. In a way, I have been . . . I must tell you more about myself, Miss Randall, so that you will understand.

"I was a singer—a light opera singer—when I married Jon. He knew how much I loved my singing, how I disliked giving it up. But we were so much in love . . ." For a moment, it seemed as though she couldn't go on. "I was happy for awhile, because of that. But Jon had so many outside interests; his work took so much of his time. I missed my singing until our little girl was born. Then as she grew older, taking less of my time, and with Anna, our housekeeper, so competent—well, I had an opportunity to sing again and I wanted to try it. But Jon said if I did, if I left, I need never come back."

That sounded like Jon—or rather, like the Jon Susan had thought of at first as being unbendable, self-centered, too ambitious to realize the importance of other people's personal needs, their longings and desires. But still Susan didn't say anything. She wanted to hear the rest of Mrs. Crawford's story.

"I didn't believe him. I thought he loved me enough that he would understand. I accepted a part in a musical opening on the West Coast. It meant so much to me to sing again. But none of my letters to Jon were answered. Then, to my amazement, I was served with divorce papers, accusing me of desertion. I was too dazed, too hurt, to fight. I still believed Jon would let me come home again, see my little girl . . ." Bitsey's mother took out a handkerchief and pressed it to her eyes.

Susan found it difficult to absorb all that she was be-

ing told. The main thought that stood out was the fact that this beautiful girl was Bitsey's mother. How could Jon have let her believe that his wife wasn't living? Although he had never said she was, or wasn't. He had never mentioned her in any way, or allowed Bitsey or the servants to speak of her, either.

"I wasn't told when Bitsey became so ill. I didn't find out she had had polio until I came back East. I knew that Jon's secretary had orders not to let me into his private office, just as Charles and Anna had been told not to let me into our house."

It seemed inconceivable to Susan that any man could have been that cruel. Except when she remembered how bitter Jon could sound, that ice-blue of his eyes at times.

"I sent Sally Travers, a close friend, to plead with Jon," Mrs. Crawford was continuing. "It was Bitsey's birthday, so I thought he might relent . . ."

This explained the woman who had gone to Jon's office and why he had been late for Bitsey's party. If the child's mother had gone herself, Jon might not have been able to refuse. Maybe Jon still loved his wife; maybe he was afraid that if he saw her again, he would forgive her.

"When I heard Bitsey was in the hospital I tried to get permission to see her, but again her father had given orders that if I came, I should not be admitted." As she talked, Bitsey's mother was weeping quietly, making no effort to hold back the tears. "Then when I learned that Bitsey was coming to this clinic, I decided to make one last attempt to see her before I went back to the Coast. I no longer care about singing; I don't believe I'll ever sing again. But I have to see my little girl just once.

"Miss Armstrong, your Director, said I should tell you my story, Miss Randall, that it would be up to

you, as Bitsey's therapist, to decide what is best for her. So I put myself at your mercy. If you think I shouldn't see her, that it would only upset her, I'll go. But if you think it is right, won't you please let me see my little girl?"

There was absolutely no doubt in Susan's mind, or heart, as to what was right. She got up from behind the desk and went over to the young woman. She smiled down into her dark eyes.

"Of course you must see Bitsey," she said.

She would speak with the child first, to prepare her for what Susan hoped—because of her own love for Bitsey—would prove to be a joyous surprise.

Bitsey was ready to leave; she had zipped up her pretty pink frock herself, adjusted her brace. She was getting to be a big girl. "Are we ready, Susan? Miss Bancroft sent word that Charles is here."

Susan was relieved because Charles, and not Jon, had come for Bitsey. For a plan was slowly forming in Susan's mind. A daring plan, but one that might work out.

"There's someone here to see you, Bitsey," she told the child. "Someone who has wanted to see you for a long, long time, who never wanted to leave you. Do you understand that, darling?"

"I—I guess so, if you say so, Susan." Bitsey's blue eyes were trusting.

Susan parted the curtains that shut off the dressing booth.

Bitsey stared at the beautiful young woman standing there. Then she almost ran to her, in spite of her brace. "Oh, Mama . . . Mama . . . it's really you!"

"My little girl . . ." Bitsey's mother gathered the child into her arms, holding her as though she would never let her go.

"You won't go away and leave me again, will you,

Mama?" Bitsey looked from her mother to Susan, her eyes pleading.

Before her mother could answer, Susan did so for her.

"Your mama won't go away again, Bitsey, if you want her to stay. You must take her home with you. You must tell your daddy that she's going to stay. And because he loves you so very much, everything will be all right."

"I'll tell Daddy what you said, Susan," the little girl promised.

Susan didn't know why she felt so certain that everything would be all right, but she did. She thought that two people who had loved each other as Jon and his wife had, with the tie of Bitsey between them, should be able to forgive and begin again.

Chapter 17

Of course, Susan's mother, when she finally learned that there was to be no wedding in the fall, was terribly disappointed. Which was putting it mildly. It was a greater disappointment than when her daughter had decided to become a Physical Therapist.

But since Mrs. Randall had enormous recuperative powers, she gradually became resigned to a situation she could not change.

After all, it might not have worked out so well. A man who would deceive her daughter as Jon Crawford had, letting her believe he was a widower instead of a divorced man, couldn't make a very good husband. And eight years' difference in ages might make for incompatibility. And social position and money weren't everything.

This was quite a concession for Mrs. Randall to make. However, she was a mother, and it worried her that Susan seemed so low-spirited. Her daughter had always been inclined to keep her feelings to herself, but Susan had insisted that she was not unhappy over Jon. She was glad she wasn't going to marry him in the fall.

"You shouldn't try to push Susie around," Gramps said, defiantly smoking his pipe in the living room and finally speaking his piece when his daughter-in-law asked him why he thought Susan went around looking so glum. "You were in too big a hurry to marry her off. She never was in love with that fellow. She just felt sorry for him and for that little girl. When she meets the right one, Susie will know it and neither you, Agnes, nor wild horses will be able to keep her from hitching up with him."

Mrs. Randall had to concede that there might be something in what Susan's grandfather said. No one could have kept her from marrying Susan's father. And she had never regretted it, even though her husband had never made a fortune. Sometimes now, she wished she hadn't been quite so highhanded and bossy with him, and that she had made more of an effort to understand him and let him know how much she loved him.

This may have been why Mrs. Randall's conscience had started to bother her in regard to Susan. Of course Susan knew how much her mother loved her, but it was hard for any mother to realize that her little girl had become a young woman who wanted to make her own decisions and live her own life.

"What has become of that Ray Farrell who used to come around?" Gramps asked. He wished now he had taken a stand long ago and smoked his pipe where and when he pleased. After all, he was the man of this household. And Agnes had not objected lately, or turned up her nose. "Now there's a fine family—the Farrells. Share and share alike. And I always thought that any young man who showed the guts that Ray Farrell did when he got hurt would one day amount to something. Maybe he wouldn't keep his family in luxury, but I'd guarantee they'd never want for anything they really needed."

Mrs. Randall had never liked Ray, but she supposed there was something in what her father-in-law was saying. At least he was single and unattached. The Farrells were liked and respected by the rest of the neighbors. They were an average American family, or what an average American family ought to be: law-abiding, churchgoing.

"I don't know what has become of him," Susan's mother said. But of course, in a way, she did. She had run him off herself. He probably still thought that Susan was going to marry someone else in the fall.

This was why Mrs. Randall's conscience gave her a nasty prick now and then when she saw how Susan looked and acted. Susan worked so hard that she never had any good times any more. And as much as Susan loved her work, it was not enough. For Susan was unhappy—there was no doubt about that. If her heart hadn't been broken over Jon Crawford, she was grieving over something.

"I always thought Ray was in love with Susie," Gramps said. "And I kinda thought Susie was in love with him, but fightin' against it like some women do for a spell."

"You think then that Susan is like every other girl and really wants to marry someday?" Of course Ray Farrell would not have been Mrs. Randall's choice for Susan, but she supposed it was up to the girl to pick out the man she wanted to marry.

"Susie's exactly like other girls, only she's prettier and smarter." Gramps puffed on his pipe. "I ran into Ray Farrell's aunt the other day and she told me Ray had got himself a real good job at last. Said he was makin' out all right."

"Is that so?"

"She says he's doin' all right now with that leg of his, too. Walkin' without a cane and no aches and pains, so he don't have to take any more treatments.

But she did say that Ray doesn't come by to visit with the family so much any more. She says she doesn't know why, but he must have some reason."

Mrs. Randall hoped that she was not responsible for keeping Ray away from his own relatives. He might be afraid of running into Susan. It might not be such a bad idea if he did. Susan might have been able to do better, but she could do worse. All her mother wanted, in the final analysis, was for Susan to be happy.

It wouldn't hurt, surely, for her to put her finger in the pie just one more time.

Mrs. Randall managed to contrive, a few days later —when marketing—a meeting with Mary Farrell. She asked about her family, and then casually asked if she knew how she could get in touch with her nephew Ray.

Mary Farrell didn't seem to consider this an unusual request. Perhaps she thought Susan wanted to reach him. Anyway, Mrs. Farrell was not one to poke her nose into other people's business. She gave Mrs. Randall Ray's address and phone number, thanked her for inquiring about the family and said for her to tell Susan she must stop by soon; they had all missed her.

When Mrs. Randall got home, she lost no time in calling Ray at the number his aunt had given her.

"I wanted to tell you," she said, when Ray answered the phone, "that I didn't give Susan your message. In fact, I didn't tell her you had been here that evening and that you had wanted, particularly, to see her. I know it was wrong of me, Ray, but I felt I was doing the right thing at the time."

"I guess it wouldn't have made any difference," Ray said slowly. "But I'm glad you told me, Mrs. Randall."

"Susan isn't going to be married in the fall, Ray."

"She isn't?" There was a short silence. Then, "Why are you telling me this, Mrs. Randall?"

"Because I thought it might make a difference." Susan's mother's tone was significant. "You see, Susan wasn't in love with Jon Crawford; she just felt sorry for him. And she wasn't going to marry him for his money; she was going to marry him because she felt his little girl needed a mother. But it turned out that Bitsey had a mother. What I mean is, her own mother wasn't dead, after all. And Susan was the one who brought them together again. So that couldn't be the reason Susan isn't happy now."

"You say Susan's not happy? Do you know why she isn't, Mrs. Randall?"

"No. But I thought maybe you could find out. Susan will be home this evening."

There was another silence.

"She will? Well, I guess it wouldn't hurt if I dropped by and tried to find out what's wrong. And it was sure nice of you to tell me all this. I guess I misjudged you, Mrs. Randall. I might have known Susan's mother would be an understanding woman."

"Why, thank you, Ray!" This young man might make a pretty nice son-in-law, after all.

"Thank *you*, Mrs. Randall. And I won't say a word to Susan about your calling me. Maybe it would be a good idea if you didn't tell her I'm coming by this evening."

To help matters along, Susan's mother found an errand she had to attend to that evening. She asked Gramps to drive along with her for company. This was rather surprising, as until recently Mrs. Randall had not considered Gramps' company especially worth cultivating. Susan was glad that her mother seemed to be mellowing toward Gramps.

"I'd ask you, Susan," she said, "but I know you're tired and would rather take it easy. Why don't you take off your uniform, dear, and slip into something cool and sit on the porch?"

Since this sounded like a good suggestion, Susan decided to follow it. She left the radio on low—there was a program of semi-classical music—and went out and sat in the swing, a stream of light coming through the opened front window.

She wasn't really tired; she just felt sort of low. The sentimental music didn't help. It was the sort of music you wanted to share with someone. As was the night; starlit, fragrant, somehow spelling romance.

She told herself she ought to be happy. Things had turned out so well for the Crawfords. Bitsey's mother and father were as much in love as ever, and Bitsey, surrounded by such love, no longer was a poor little rich girl.

The day after Susan had sent Bitsey home with her mother, another huge box of long stemmed red roses had arrived for her. With it had been a note from Jon, in which he had said that the only way he knew to thank her was by trying to make things up to Elizabeth and Bitsey.

But the real thanks had been the happiness in a little girl's eyes.

Susan ought to be happy, too, because now she wouldn't have to give up her work at the clinic. Miss Armstrong had been delighted to renew Susan's contract for another year. Or for as long as Susan wished.

It was wonderful to be able to do the kind of work you enjoyed and that brought so many compensations. But lately there were times when Susan, in looking ahead, wondered if her work would always be enough. It could be for someone like Miss Armstrong, but Susan wasn't certain she had that much fortitude.

How long had it been, she asked herself, closing her eyes and swinging slowly back and forth in the swing, since she had seen Ray? It didn't seem like weeks; it seemed like months or even years.

She couldn't understand why he had never answered her note. Perhaps, though, she had hurt his pride by suggesting that he go to Jon for help in getting a job.

Of course now Susan realized that she never could have gone through with that marriage in the fall. She had never loved Jon. She couldn't have become his wife even for Bitsey's sake. Love was the most important thing in all the world.

Lost in such thoughts, Susan had not heard anyone come up on the porch. She didn't know what caused her to open her eyes. Nor why, when she saw Ray standing there, that little one-sided smile on his mouth, she wasn't more surprised.

"I hope I didn't wake you up—spoil your dreams," he said. "Hello, Susan."

"Hello." She spoke as though it had been only yesterday that they had seen each other. "I wasn't asleep. But I guess I was dreaming, in a way."

Ray sat down on the swing beside her. "I hope they were happy dreams, Susan."

"If they weren't too happy, it's all right now," Susan said.

"Good." He took one of her hands in his, his eyes smiling into hers in the soft flood of light from inside the house. "I came to say what I've been wanting to say for a long, long time, Susan." His eyes were very serious. "I couldn't let you help me make good—I had to do it on my own. When I went to the boss to ask for a chance at a better job, he told me there was an opening in personnel and they'd had me in mind . . . So even if I don't become president of

the company, I do have a future with them, Susan."

"Oh, that's wonderful!" But what she wanted to hear was what he had been wanting to tell her for a long time.

"I'll be able to take care of a wife now. Not in the grand style, of course, with servants, a big house, and all those . . ."

"Who wants all those things?" Susan interrupted.

"I was afraid, after my accident, I could never ask any girl to marry me."

"*Any* girl?"

"The one and only girl. The girl I love. I was afraid you wouldn't wait long enough . . . Susan, do you think you might just change your mind about not getting married and take a chance with me—say, in a year or so?"

"A year or so!" Susan shook her head, her eyes smiling back into his. "If you'll hurry up and ask me, Ray, we could get married right away. Or soon, anyhow. I can go on working at the clinic—lots of wives do, you know. Together we can manage until you do become, if not the president of the company, at least one of the bigwigs. You will, you know, with a wife to help you."

"You bet I will! And of course I wouldn't ask you to give up your work when it means so much to you, Susan. Not for awhile, anyway. As for asking you to marry me—will you, honey?"

Susan was so happy she could hardly stand it. To think she had fought falling in love and had thought she didn't want to be married!

"Well, aren't you going to kiss me, darling?" she asked boldly.

And when Ray took her in his arms, Susan knew that that was where she belonged.

Susan Randall

After three years at an exclusive girls' school, Susan Randall decided to finish her education by taking a course in physical therapy at the University.

Upon graduation, Susan threw herself wholeheartedly into her work as a physical therapist in a New York clinic.

It was incidental to Susan that handso Jon Crawford, whose small daughter w patient at her clinic, was a very rich man Susan's scheme of things, Jon was no m important than her young neighbor, Ray H rell, disabled and embittered by a seri accident. Through her skill, perhaps she co bring Ray back to health...

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